

“Loves Me! Loves Me Not” John 21: 4 – 14 Pastor Dan Anderson

**Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.**

**He called out to them, “*Friends, haven’t you any fish?*”**

**“No,” they answered.**

**He said, “*Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.*”**

**When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.**

**Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “*It is the Lord!*” As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, “*It is the Lord,*” he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.**

**Jesus said to them, “*Bring some of the fish you have just caught.*”**

**Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, “*Come and have breakfast.*” None of the disciples dared ask him, “*Who are you?*” They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish.**

**This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.**

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Last week, as I was enjoying lunch with some of the men from the Ambassadors Bridge, the topic of conversation turned to summer camps. Some of my friends were remembering how much it cost when they sent their own children off to camp – and a few could remember how much it cost when they themselves went for a week of camp.

Their conversation triggered my own recollections of summers spent at Camp Hebron just outside of Attleboro, MA. Outside of Pastor Goff, I doubt that many of you know where Attleboro is, much Hebronville. During my formative years, Camp Hebron was my summer home.

Mom was the camp cook and dad directed some of the kids’ camps so we lived on the camp grounds in a small cabin. I had various camp jobs throughout the summer – often working on the Dining Hall clean-up crew or at the Snack Shack. It was at summer camp that I found my first romances.

Every week a new batch of campers and workers would come to Camp Hebron and every week, as they lined up outside of the dining hall for their 1<sup>st</sup> gathering, from inside the building I would look over the crowd for the cutest girl I could find – the one I would pursue for the coming week.

With such a short amount of time there had to be a way to find out quickly if this particular girl would “fall in love” with me. Somewhere along the line I learned the “Daisy” method. Wild daisies grew all along the road between the camp and the railroad bridge. If I picked a daisy and plucked the petals, one at a time saying, “*She loves me, she loves me not . . .*” I was supposed to be able to determine if the relationship was worth pursuing. (Sometimes I would peek ahead and if the daisy was not going to give me the outcome I wanted, I would pick another and start over).

When I recall that *game*, “loves me, loves me not,” I think that sometimes we are inclined to play the daisy pedal picking game with God. Does God love me?

Sure. God loves us. A few Sundays ago we sang a glorious hymn, “The love of God is greater far than tongue or pen could ever tell” – of course God love us,

But then there are times when we see the awfulness of our sin and convince ourselves that no one could love us, not even God.

Then again, God is not like anybody we know and God surely overlooks our failings and loves us still . . .

However, while nobody else knows the real me, I know the real me, and God knows the real me . . .

But I remember that John 3:16 says “*God loved the whole world*” and *the whole world* - and that includes me, and Romans says that “*While we were sinners Christ died for us*” so, I guess that God loves us . . .

But who could forgive me for the awful things I’ve done. I cannot forgive myself and I doubt that God could forgive me. Surely God does not love me. Nobody loves me!

So we remain restless, going back and forth, “*loves me, loves me not!*”

When I read the whole of Scripture, when I look at the words and actions of Jesus, I see the unwavering love of God. The account before us is a case in point.

## 1. **How Do We Know God Loves Us?**

**Right where we are, God comes and meets our needs.**

The disciples had been fishing all night and had caught nothing. All night and caught nothing. Anyone who has ever been fishing can identify with the plight of the disciples.

I used to be a fisherman. As a matter of fact, fishing was a part of my seminary training. My friend Dave and I are back and forth on e-mail every week. He was my fishing instructor in seminary.

We had a favorite fishing “hole” in the Chisago Lakes area. I remember one chilly October morning, rowing our rented boat into our favorite spot. Dave was the first to get a line in the water and, on the first cast, hauled in a pretty good Northern. *Ah-hah*, I thought. *Gonna be a good day!*

A few moments later he landed another fish – a pretty good bass. As a matter of fact, Dave caught 2 more bass and another good size northern . . . and I caught nothing.

I cast in the same places he cast. I used the same lures. I copied his retrieve speed . . . and caught nothing. My arm got tired. The benches in the boat were too hard. I began to notice how cold this October day was becoming. I was hungry. I was fishless and I was frustrated!

I imagine this is a bit of what the disciples felt – cold, tired, hungry, exasperated.

Jesus saw them in their need, came to them in their need, and met them at their point of need!

They were fishless – and he provided them with fish  
They were hungry – and he provided them with food  
They were cold – and he built them a shore fire.

This is how God comes to us – ready to meet us in our need. God does not say, “*Before I will demonstrate my love to you, you must become more spiritual.*”

“*Before I will love you and come to your aid, You must clean up your act.*”

God comes to us and offers to meet our needs right where we are. And when Jesus comes to us, he asks for our response.

Consider these disciples:

- Jesus said, “*Cast your net on the other side of the boat*” – and they did.
- He said, “*Bring me some fish*” – and they did.
- He said, “*Come and have breakfast*” and they came and ate.
- He said, “*Sit here by my fire*” and they sat and were warmed.

They did not say, “*Oh, Jesus, we smell too much like fish – let us go and clean up.*”

They did not say, “*Oh, Jesus, we are the ones who doubted you and fled, we don’t deserve to come*”

Instead they responded to God’s offer of love. When Jesus came to them, they allowed him to meet their needs.

How Do We Know God Loves Us? Right where we are, God comes and meets our needs.

Jesus gave us this invitation, “*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*” (Mt 11: 28, 29)

God wants to meet us at our point of need.

I walked through a cemetery with a dear woman who tragically lost her son. She was angry with God. She doubted that God cared for her. As she stood by the grave she yelled at God for abandoning her. She also asked God for help in her grief – and God came to her, with strength and courage and caring people – and her faith was restored in a God who loves us, and comes right where we are to meet our needs.

## 2. How Do We Know God Loves Us?

**Right where we are, God comes and offers acceptance.**

You do not need me to remind you that all of us are different. Consider our staff for a minute. Which two of us are most alike? Consider the diversity of our church family – occupations, education, personalities, talents, ethnicities, ages, family structures. Each of us is unique and different.

God loves each of us, right now, right where we are, and accepts us at that point. God does not ask us to be someone else. Jesus loves us for who we are – as unique creations of God’s design.

Consider Peter and John in this account. These are two very different individuals!

One seems much more emotional and reactive. The other, more sensitive and calm.

- Earlier, when Jesus asked the disciples who he was, Peter blurted out, “*You are the Christ!*” – without really knowing what he was saying but probably guessing that was the right answer.
- In the garden, when soldiers came to take Jesus away, Peter drew his sword and slashed off the ear of one of the guards.
- In a courtyard, outside the trial of Jesus, Peter, perhaps with cursing, vehemently denied knowing his Savior and Leader – “*Go to Minot. I don’t even know him!*”
- On another occasion Peter said to Jesus, “*Go away from me. I am a sinful man!*”

And now, when he recognizes Jesus on shore, what did he do? He put on his clothing, (he had stripped down to his skivvies while pulling in the net of fish), and once he was fully dressed with his long flowing garments, he jumped in the water and swam to Jesus on the shore.

John, on the other hand, seems a bit more refined and dignified and sensible.

- After the resurrection, he was the first to recognize that the folded grave clothes meant Jesus was alive.
- Here, on this morning, he was the first to recognize Jesus on the shore, and when he realized it was Jesus he simply said, “It is the Lord.”
- And then he did the sensible thing. He stayed with the boat and the catch until they were able to get both safely to shore.

Christ does not reject either response or say one is better than the other. He does not say to John, “*You have a flat affect – why don’t you show a little more emotion!?*”

And he does not say to Peter, “*How could you do something as stupid as jumping out of a boat?*” He loves them both. He accepts them as they are.

God does not ask us to be like someone else. God comes to us without qualification with arms open wide.

I have told a bit of my faith journey in the Ridgewood 101 class. I grew up in a pastor’s home, learning the correct way to behave to win the approval of church people. And I got pretty good at it! – but I was as phony as a \$3 bill. I clearly remember the day when God looked inside my heart and said to me, “*Dan. I know you are as phony as a \$3 bill. I know you are play-acting at this Christian faith. Listen, I know how you are wired – I know how you are made – your abilities and liabilities – and I love you – just as you are. Won’t you love me back?*”

It was a transforming moment. God knew me and still came to me with love and acceptance and forgiveness.

**How Do We Know God Loves Us? Right where we are, God comes and offers acceptance.**

One last point.

### **3. How Do We Know God Loves Us?**

**Right where we are, God comes and invites us into partnership.**

Have you ever played the “*If only*” game? It is a lot like the “daisy game.”

- *If only I . . . had an exciting conversion story, then God could use my testimony of faith to reach others,*
- *If only I could be a famous athlete, than God could use my fame to influence others,*
- *If only I had some great musical talent, than God could use my musical ability*
- *If only I had more money, than God could use my money for the spread of The Good News*
- *If only I was younger, than God could use my energy*
- *If Only I were older, than people would listen to what I have to say,*
- *I just don’t have the right things going for me right now. If only . . .*

God does not want us to say “*if only.*” God comes to us, right where we are, and invites us into partnership.

God wants to use who we are, where we are in service to God and others.

Consider again the disciples. There are many ways that Jesus could have met their needs.

- Jesus could have said, “*You are in the wrong place. You should go on down to fisherman’s cove. The fish are really biting down there*”
- He could have said, “*You are using the wrong bait. You need to use a fancy lure like Dan’s friend Dave uses, then you will catch some fish*”
- And I believe Jesus could have said, “*These guys are such losers I will have to do it myself.*” If he could calm the waters and walk on the sea, certainly he could have caused the fish to jump into the boat.

Jesus did not choose to act that way.

He said, *Cast **your** net on the other side of **your** boat.*

He used their resources, their boat and their nets.

When they came to shore he said “Bring me some of your fish”

Right where we are, God comes to us, and invites us to join in partnership with Jesus – using the resources already at our disposal.

Someone might say, *“I am too sinful. My past is too checkered. I am not sure God would want to use me”*

God is a God of forgiveness. God is a God of new beginnings.

Consider Peter. He denied Christ, yet at Pentecost, he was the key spokesman for Christ and on his witness and ministry the Church was established.

Consider The Apostle Paul.

He persecuted the Christians. He struggled with sin. There was some sort of “thorn in the flesh” from which he did not gain release.

Yet God invited Paul into partnership and Paul became one of the most articulate and powerful missionaries of the Christian Faith.

In spite of shortcomings, God loved Paul enough to come to him right where he was and invite him into partnership.

Some time ago a friend told me a story about an incident from the life of a well-known pastor.

Early in his ministry as a “rookie pastor,” he was introduced to one of the more prominent and influential doctors in town. The young pastor felt pulled to reach out to this person of influence and power, yet at the same time felt young and inadequate.

The doctor exuded an aura of confidence, success and satisfaction. What would he want to hear from a “still wet behind the ears” pastor? So the rookie pastor procrastinated until he was a bit more prepared and established in town.

What this pastor did not know was that while the doctor of influence seemed outwardly successful and content, inwardly he was in turmoil. Everyone was shocked when the doctor took his own life.

God had wanted to partner with this young pastor in reaching out to a broken man – but he had complained of inadequacy. Like Moses, he said, *“I am not eloquent. Send someone else.”*

On the other hand I think of Eleanor Charleton, an 80+-year-old widow who lived in a small New England town. Somehow, when I was a seminary student, she found my name. Neither Judy nor I had ever met her, yet she wrote me a letter and said, *“I will be praying for you and your family.”*

Through my years of seminary and then as we moved to Iowa, Eleanor prayed for us. We exchanged pictures and had the opportunity to meet her before she died. She did not have much to give in her later years, but she could pray. And she did. God met her where she was and invited her into partnership with a young pastor and his family.

I don’t know each of your situations, but I do know that God wants to work with the talents and abilities you have.

Jesus comes to us, right where we are, and invites to join him in partnership. He does not ask us to be someplace else or someone else, he wants to work in and through our lives.

Sometimes we vacillate back and forth between, “*God Loves me, and God loves me not.*”  
Sometimes we say *if only I*, then God would love me?

The Good News is that God’s love for us is unwavering.

- Right where we are, God comes and meets our needs
- Right where we are, God comes and offers acceptance.
- Right where we are, God comes and invites us into partnership.

**Right where we are, Jesus gently comes to us  
. . . and invites us to come to God.**

Will you respond God’s loving kindness. Will you respond to God’s grace. Just as you are, come, receive Christ’s cleansing. Receive His healing. Bask in the wondrous love of our Savior. Respond by offering back a life of loving service.

Pastor Lane is going to sing a wonderful old hymn, *Just As I am, I come*. As he sings, reflect on the Good News of God’s Love. Respond as Christ’s Spirit invites you.