

Christ's Surprising Moments

¹⁵ When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

¹⁶ Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

¹⁷ The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."

¹⁸ I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go."

¹⁹ Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

We had a lovely Easter Sunday two weeks ago with a lot of new faces and the inclusion of many people who are rarely with us. Last week, we enjoyed our Cantata which was focused on God's help in the disappointing moments of life and experiencing God as SHELTER in our lives. Easter is always a high time as we celebrate the resurrection of Christ but then when Easter is over, we suddenly drop back to where we were – to kind of a mundane and even discouraged mode.

But you need to know that this was not the way it was for the early church. To Christians in the church of the first century, they did not celebrate Easter once a year. They celebrated the resurrection of Christ every single Sunday. Each time they came together they spoke of the risen Christ. They even changed their day of worship from the Sabbath (Saturday) to Sunday (Resurrection Day). Their creeds and litanies were about the resurrection.

On Easter Sunday, I used the phrase, "**He is risen**" and then congregation responded, "**He is risen indeed.**" This response came from the first century worship where this was probably recited every Sunday. No, we should never say, "**Easter is over!**" for Easter should be every day. Christ's resurrection was not an event that had short-term importance.

In my Midweek article, I spoke of Christians as being "Post-Resurrection People". But too often, we don't see it that way. We go back to our same melancholy nature and mood as soon as Easter is over.

We are like this with life events as well.. All kinds of preparations are put into a wedding. Dresses, tuxes, candles, flowers, reception, vows, and in 45 minutes, the event has come and gone. However, does that mean that when the wedding is over, the marriage is over? (in some cases that is probably true). Of course not, the wedding is to signify the beginning! The marriage has only begun and there is much work and joy that hopefully is being put into the marriage. Too often that is how we treat Easter. When the Easter bonnet is hung up in the closet and the Lillies begin to droop and turn brown, a sadness comes over us! But no matter what you think or feel, HE IS NOT HERE, HE IS RISEN!! That is the good news of the gospel.

The Christians in the early church knew that the validity of their salvation all hinged upon that empty tomb – so they celebrated the empty tomb. It meant something to them and it should mean everything to us. I'm not so sure about the disciples of Jesus during that final week. The week was full of surprises. It began with the triumphal entry into Jerusalem when Palm branches were laid down. Then it continued with the frightening words of Jesus in the upper room when he spoke to them of his death. Then came his arrest which was certainly a surprise because they believed his purpose and role was to remain with them and to establish a political kingdom and overthrow Rome.

Their balloon of hope and anticipation was burst at the crucifixion! Then came the biggest surprise and joy of all which was the empty tomb and the Good News shared by the women who got there first. The surprises continued as He appeared to them in the room where they were gathered. He walked through a closed door right into their midst.

I find it strange that these disciples of Jesus who had seen so many amazing surprises, gathered their nets and put them into their boat and went back to fishing. Had they abandoned Jesus' plan? Had they not understood Him when he said in John 16 that they would do greater things than he, once he is gone and the Holy Spirit comes? I don't know, perhaps they were biding their time until they would be filled with the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, they were back fishing when Jesus appeared to them again.

Remember how he surprised them at the start of his ministry by performing a miracle, telling them to lower their nets on the other side of the boat. They had been out all night trying to catch fish and they had been unsuccessful. It was toward morning when Jesus came along, realized their lack of success and told them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat. When they did, they reeled in their nets and they were full of fish. He had amazed them with this miracle. Then he told them to put down their nets and follow him for he would make them **“Fishers of Men.”**

Now at the end of his earthly ministry, he repeats this miracle by filling their nets with 153 fish. And then he invites them to shore where he has some fish cooking over the fire. Call it a going-away party or perhaps a debriefing between a departing commander and his soldiers, Jesus spends a few moments chatting with his friends. But it was more than that. It was a

reinstatement of Peter as a disciple. To the very end, Jesus spoke in allegory more than he did plain language. Here he asks, “**Peter, do you love me?**” and Peter’s response was, “**You know that I love you.**” Three time he asks Peter, “**Do you love me.**” And three times Peter response in the affirmative in a slightly more adamant way. Each time, Jesus gives Peter a similar but slightly different command. First, it was “**Feed my lambs**”, then it was “**Take care of my sheep**”, then finally it was “**Feed my sheep.**” Maybe it was because Peter denied Jesus three times that Jesus then asks the question three times. But each time after Peter responded with, “**You know I love you,**” Jesus responds with “**Then take care of my sheep.**”

More surprising moments in the end of Jesus ministry led to even more surprising moments. The ascension of Jesus into heaven. The coming of the H.S. at Pentecost. The healing of the lame man by Peter. One surprising moment after another.

Last week we finished the Lenten Adventure and I hope that this was not a conclusion but rather a beginning for you. I hope that like the disciples, you will be filled with God’s surprises in your life – because it does not end with the resurrection of Christ. That is only the beginning. Like Peter and the disciples who were surprised by Jesus’ miracle of an abundance of fish, I hope that you will realize that this post-resurrection surprise illustrates the way in which Christ wants to fill your life to overflowing.

The overflow comes from when we commit ourselves to him. Jesus called his disciples just three years earlier and it almost seems that Peter didn’t get it. He denied he even knew Jesus. But here along the shore of Galilee, we see God’s grace at work. Jesus welcomes Peter back into his circle of disciples. He then challenges him to “**feed his sheep.**” God has a plan for your life. He does not merely want you to bask in the glory of his resurrection, but he wants you to proclaim the risen Christ to others. So before you think that Easter is over, let me remind you that the power of the resurrection is the surprise that propels us into service for him. Before you think that you are not good enough or “holy” enough to serve Christ, remember that Peter denied he even knew Jesus, but Jesus welcomed him back into the inner circle.

Before you think that you have nothing to contribute, remember that Peter went from a weak, waffling and outspoken fisherman to being one of the greatest disciples because he accepted God’s forgiveness and said, “**Yes Lord, you know I love you.**” Let us pray.

“Lord, we come thinking that the surprises are over. Father, give us faith to know that you always lay before us opportunities and privileges that bring us unimaginable joy and amazement. Father, forgive us for saying, “**Why Lord, you know I love you,**” and then walking away to do our own thing. May we be your disciples offering ourselves as living sacrifices to do what you’ve called us to do. Father, create in us a love for your sheep. Allow us to serve with a passion to love as you love. As we go out from this place of worship, let us go out with the resurrection joy of the early church that lived daily with the hope of the empty tomb.

Amen