

“Do YOU love me?”

Acts 9: 1-20; John 21: 1-19

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Rerun of April 25, 2004

When life overwhelms or we find ourselves in a real crunch, we go back to what we know how to do best....whether it's fishing...like the disciples, compulsive cleaning, whining, over-eating, excessive hours at work. We do this because we can do it without thinking, or because it's easy...we're comfortable. In times of crisis, because we honestly don't know how we should respond...so we don't really respond at all. We resist...like Saul...and the older we get, often the more resistance there is.

But if in your return to routine, you use the time to assess where you really are and what you really want, and look beyond the obvious to reflect on the mystery of how God is moving in your life, then that time is not a hedge, but a gift.

It seems to me there is a connection between the 3 days Saul was blind, and the 3 days of the burial, and 3 appearances, and Jesus' repeating the question “Do you love me?” three times?

Sometimes, it takes some time. If a quicker response was required, if there isn't some space between what is and what can be, if no space is offered or allowed, would we ever really be able to see or understand deeply and choose a different response to life? God knows, it takes some time...and God is willing to give it.

Asking Peter 3 times, gives him a chance to really hear what is being asked and Jesus a

chance to meet Peter where he really is. For us..., if we don't take time to drop below the surface challenges of life and the great invitation from God to renew life by changing it, if we feel pushed, or rush to judgment or make a hasty decision, we will probably respond to life more like Ananias did....Do I really have to? Do I really have to go...or stay? Do I really have to go to the trouble maker and extend God's love to even him/her? Can't I just make nice or pretend he/she isn't there? Anyone but him/her Lord...anyone! That is the human response. God knows it. Doesn't judge it. And gives some time for us to sink below the level of our initial response to find our better response.

Do you love me? Really, well then....Do you love me? Ah then, Do you love me?

The third time Jesus poses this question to Peter, Jesus' uses a different word in the language for love. He switches from his use of the word “agape” which is self-sacrificing love, to the word “philiros” which is affection. He meets Peter's three denials with three opportunities. He moves to the level of commitment at which Peter is and meets him there. Peter must have been relieved that Jesus accepted him at his level of commitment...accepts us, too!

Meaning? If you are not in a place within yourself to offer self-sacrifice on behalf of others, then offer affection. Do you know what the word affection's root meaning is? To influence or attack plus the verb “to do”. So, if you love God, you are called to influence or attack a situation at hand that affects....one of these little one, a friend, a lover, a stranger, a difficult person in your life.

If you love Jesus...God, you are called to the Saul's of our world who are actually working to destroy you, or using the image of lambs and sheep...called to those who follow blindly or get lost along the way, the young ones and youth who do not know better because they have not grown up taught in the "way".

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It's Eastertide. Love is in full bloom. We use symbols of butterflies to bring our attention to the fact that all is being transformed right before our eyes if we have eyes to see. The butterfly affect is in affect! This is a term from meteorology which reflects the idea a small change in initial conditions will become amplified over time and create a large change in later conditions. That is, if a butterfly flaps its wings in South America, this can create a storm in Eastern Europe or Asia. Every tiny influence or motion has a far-reaching consequence. This is the lesson of the butterfly affect...from science.

From faith's perspective...the butterfly affect reflects how much power each one of us, each action done by each one of us, has on the world. It's how the world changes...one action, one butterfly reaction at a time...starting with wherever you are, whatever is going on in your life...this really changes everything!

Yet, God doesn't expect more from you than is realistic to expect. The question is...do you? Do you expect something reasonable from yourself? Do you expect yourself to influence the world around you...or will you only let your world influence you?

Do you love Jesus, God?

Visit the sick and the lonely.

Teach the love of Jesus to those eager to hear of it...better yet...live it!

Hold steadfast to the ethics of compassion in your professional decisions, large and small.

Cook, wash, mow the lawn, paint the garage, and provide for those you love.

We know how others hurt and we can respond...even if it is simply coming up along side of them silently staying, loving them without words or fixing...flapping our butterfly wings. We are to give our lives away in even the smallest of ways. We may never see any glorious results in our own time in doing the little things. But that does not mean our wings aren't changing things.

We may never receive credit for all the tending and feeding we do. It certainly won't make the headlines. Given the news these days and our inability to wrap our heads around why/how people are able destroy human life in neighborhoods, around kitchen tables, within combat zones...it may not seem like anyone is flapping their butterfly wings at all...but they are...and it matters...have faith!

God gathers up all the small things...the flappings of all the wings of all the butterflies...and the kindom comes. This is the promise.

We can stay the course, be who we are really called and wanting to be, one small flap of our wings at a time. We can stay the course because we know others right here in this room somehow, despite all odds, are staying the course. We can stay the course, because Christ is our anchor...not weighing us down in judgment, but grounding us in what it is that really matters...our part in creating a world of peace, freedom, and delight...starting with the 3 feet of world immediately adjacent to each one of us!

The butterfly affect. Do YOU love me?