



Easter Sunday
The Collect

ALMIGHTY God, who through thine only-begotten Son Jesus Christ hast overcome death, and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life; We humbly beseech thee that, as by thy special grace preventing us thou dost put into our minds good desires, so by thy continual help we may bring the same to good effect; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost ever, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

15 So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, **Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?** He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, **Feed my lambs.** 16 He saith to him again the second time, **Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?** He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, **Feed my sheep.** 17 He saith unto him the third time, **Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?** Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, **Lovest thou me?** And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, **Feed my sheep.** 18 **Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldst: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldst not.** 19 This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, **Follow me.** 20 Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee? 21 Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? 22 Jesus saith unto him, **If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.** 23 Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, **He shall not die;** but, **If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?** 24 This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true. 25 And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. *Amen.* (John 21:15-25)

When your love and care for someone is greater than your vocabulary can express, you nonetheless do your utmost to capture the goodness and character of the object of your love with such language that leaves room for assumptions of greater magnitude than your words have described. That approach captures the writing of John in perfection. His beautiful and figurative language surpasses the greatest of our literary giants yet John feels that even this language does not do justice in painting a full portrait of Christ. When I was a very young boy, my mother would ask me "How much do you love mother, Jerry?" I would then stretch my childish arms as wide as I could and say, "This much, mother." But if my arms had been ten times longer, I would not have felt them sufficient to express just how much I loved my mother. John faces the same dilemma because of his great and abiding love for Christ. We shall see this expressed in the last verse of John's Gospel.

Why does John love Christ so greatly? Do you know that love begets love? John has an exceedingly deep love for Christ because he is reciprocating that love which Christ feels for John. Simple, is it not? John hints of this in his first epistle: *Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.* (1 John 4:10) and John states it outright in this verse from the same Epistle: *We love him, because he first loved us.* (1 John 4:19) If you have been operating under the assumption that Christ loves you because you love Him, it is time to recognize that just the reverse is true. So John records in tender words this third meeting of Christ with His disciples. John typically uses the third person adjective in referring to himself out of modesty. The incident he describes between the Lord and Simon Peter is tenderly expressed and gives a full light on the Lord's regard for Peter as a strong disciple though he has denied Christ very recently, and three times. We note that John refrains from reminding us that Peter denied Christ, but it is alluded to indirectly in the narrative.

You will recall that early in the ministry of Jesus, He called a man to follow Him by the name of Simon bar Jonas (Simon son of Jonas). This was when Simon was a fisherman and man of the sea. But Jesus gave Simon another name when he became a disciple of Christ – Cephas, or stone. (John 1:42) In the Greek, the word is ἰσθῆνης , or Petrus, which means a piece of a rock. Jesus is the Rock, and, if we have His same nature, we will be like that great Rock from which we are chipped. (Matthew 16:18) So, the great apostle began as Simon the fisherman three years before on the Galilean shore, and winds up as Peter the shepherd of the lambs of God on this same seaside setting. Is this not quite a stretch? When a man or woman comes to Christ they are made new creatures in Him from that moment forward.

"In a gallery in Europe there hang, side by side, the first unlovely sketch that Rembrandt ever drew, and his great masterpiece, which all men admire. So in the two names of Simon and Peter, we have in the first a rude fisherman who came to Jesus that day, the man as he was before Jesus began a work in him; and second, the man as he became during the years when friendship of Jesus had warmed his heart and enriched his life." J.R. Miller, *Personal Friendships of Jesus*.

Gathered about a breakfast fire by the peaceful Galilean shore, there is such a joy and comfort in all hearts to be again with their Master whom they had considered to have been dead. Of course, it was true that He had been dead, but the greater miracle was that He had risen from the Tomb and now sat at meat with them. There are no more cordial and warmly felt discussions than those that take place after a good meal. There had been plenty of fish, and more than enough bread; and now there will be

another serving of that Bread which came down from Heaven. *So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. 16 He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. 17 He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me?* Why did Christ ask Simon Peter the same question three times over? Shall we connect the dots? I will avoid the complex issue of shades of meaning in the Greek text for the sake of this devotion; but we will need to review in our hearts those events that have preceded this line of questioning by Christ to Simon Peter.

Perhaps we have too often made reference to Peter's denial of Christ the night of His betrayal, but the events surrounding Peter's thrice denial has a direct bearing on this present circumstance. Jesus has fulfilled a promise, made just before His Passion, to meet the disciples in Galilee: *All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee.* (Matt 26:31-32) But see the reaction to these words of Jesus by the boisterous Peter at the time: *Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended.* (Matt 26:33) Strong sounding words, yet words that Peter was unable to back up with courage and action. *Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee.* (Matt 26:34-35)

Peter did, that very night, deny Christ thrice before the cock crew. Do you remember the humiliating affair? *And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.* (Luke 22:60-62) Notice that on the third denial, "*the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter!*" Can you imagine, out of fear, denying your own father to the death by firing squad and have he turn and acknowledge that betrayal? What agony filled Peter's heart for all these days since his fall. He wept bitterly, and he hated himself for his own weakness and denial of the best friend he would ever have in this life, or in the life to come. And you will recall from the earlier lesson that the Angel at the Garden Tomb told the women gathered to go your way, "*..... tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee*" (Mark 16:7) So what is so remarkable about this counsel of the Angel? It is evidence that the Lord is aware of Simon Peter's anguish and therefore mentions Peter by name in his counsel – the only disciple mentioned by name! See how lovingly kind and merciful is Christ our Lord!

Christ is gently opening Peter's memory to that terrible night of denial and betrayal. But He masks His loving rebuke in terms of affection and care. "*Lovest thou me more than these?*" "How much do you love me, son? Do you love me more than anything in the world?" My mother intended this point in asking how much I loved her. Of course, Peter honestly answers that he loves the Lord, but he does not even suspect the direction the questioning is headed. Jesus then tells Peter to "*Feed my lambs.*" Lambs are baby sheep that need feeding before they become adult sheep. So first of all, *Simon, Feed my the lambs of my embryonic Church!* Now you will notice that after the second and third question of love, the Lord tells Peter to "feed, not my lambs, but my sheep!" When lambs are well fed they will grow into sheep. When our young are brought under

the teaching of the Church, it is our responsibility to feed them with the milk of the Word, and when they are weaned of the milk, then we feed them with the meat of the Word as adult sheep.



Now comes a somber prophecy from the Lord to Peter: *Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldst: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldst not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God.* The Lord knew that though Peter had experienced a lapse of courage in denying Him, he would from henceforth have great faith and courage in propagating the Gospel, and would die a martyrs death at the last. The idea that peter was crucified upside down is nowhere proved in Scripture. It follows the line of Satanist who constantly foist upon society an upside down `peace' cross. The false account comes down to us from Roman fables. Peter would now have an undying courage that he briefly demonstrated in the Garden when he drew his sword against the guards who came for Christ.

And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me. This is a repeat of the first command Christ ever uttered to Simon Peter by the same Galilean shore three years earlier at the beginning of His ministry. (Matthew 4:19) He calls us to "*Follow Me*" yet, when we fail, He forgives and tells us once more, "*Follow Me.*" Are we so much better than Peter that we are not likely to fail in great manner? I think not. We all fail and falter, yet Jesus stretches down His mighty arm to pull us from the foaming waters of the sea.

Jesus had directly counseled Peter to "*Follow Me;*" yet the disciples whom the Lord loved followed without being directed. Words did not draw John, but love did. *Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee?* Please observe an unbridgeable breach in human frailty. Peter has just been forgiven a horrendous sin of denying his Lord three times, yet he is now jealous, again, as to who will be most favored by the Lord. He saw John following and remembered that Jesus had a particular love for John. *Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this*

man do? John is writing this narrative, but he writes without rancor in giving a straightforward account. He does not demean Peter's character in asking.

A good soldier, in the heat of battle, never questions the validity of higher orders. He simply obeys without question. This is a further lesson that Peter must learn: Jesus saith unto him, *If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.* How an employer treats one employee as opposed to another is no one's business as long as he keeps faith with both in the bargain for their labors. Jesus has told Peter to *follow me.* That is enough for Peter. *Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?* Jesus never said that John would tarry until His second Coming, but simply asked what was it of concern to Peter if he did. It should be observed that John did live to a ripe old age of all the disciples. He wrote the last Book of the Bible even – Revelations!

John openly admits here that it is he who has written the words of this Gospel. He does so, still, without mentioning his own name. *This is the disciple which testified of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true.* John's modesty is inconsistent with the glory-grabbers of the modern pulpit!

Here follows John's benediction to his Gospel: *And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.* Can we not sense his unsurpassed love and feeling for Christ here in this conclusion. There is so much more goodness of Christ to tell that the world could not contain the books! No matter how powerfully we preach and teach of Christ, no matter our labors or self-abnegation, it never comes up to the measure of glory and greatness fitting the Lord. Jesus to us, and to John, is always greater than we can preach or comprehend. So closes the lovely Gospel of John. I love the book, I love the man, John, and I love the Lord of whom he has written.