

Three Dimensions of Love
John 21:15-25

We are now in the season of Eastertide. Our hearts have been revived in the spirit of Our Lord's resurrection. The Lord Jesus Christ was not the only one who was resurrected; the disciples were resurrected, too. After what they saw on Good Friday, the disciples were devastated, defeated, and disillusioned. But then came Easter. Christ breathed new life into them. He shared his resurrection with them. Likewise when we have faith in the resurrection of Christ, Christ breathes new life into us.

Let's recall the story of the resurrection. Early on the first day of the week, after the Lord died, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and John and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."

Then, Peter and John set out and went toward the tomb and went into the tomb. They saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then, the disciples returned to their homes remembering what the women said, that they heard the angel saying, "Go quickly and tell his disciples, 'he has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee ; then you will see him.'"

I think from that point there was some racing among the disciples. Peter ran to Andrew, Andrew ran to Thomas. Thomas ran to Nathanael. While John ran to James, James ran to Phillip, and Philip ran to Bartholomew. Twelve disciples to seventy disciples. Seventy disciples, from Jerusalem to Galilee , Galilee to Judea , Judea to Samaria , They all ran. Ran and ran and ran. They had to run and run and run without delay.

It was like our church's prayer chain, from Donna Cool to Cheryl, Cheryl to Berneice, Berneice to Bernadine, Bernadine to mom Donna, mom Donna to Ilene, Ilene to June, June to Bonnie, Bonnie to Connie, Connie to the other Bonnie, the other Bonnie to Jeanene, Jeanene to Mary, Mary to Thelma, Thelma to Jean, Jean to Linda, Linda to Shirley, Shirley to Elaine. They busily call and send messages. In Biblical times, with no telephones, running was the best way to send a message quickly.

So, early on Easter morning the races started in every street, side-street and alley. They ran through short-cuts and knocked on doors and delivered the great news of victory. They did as the women said, "Go quickly and tell his disciples, 'he has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee ; then you will see him,'"

The old fishermen, the disciples, were getting together at Galilee one by one. They were Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James, John, and two other disciples. "I'm going out to fish," Peter suggested. And they followed, saying, "We'll go with you." Probably they ran to the Galilee .

Early in the morning on the shore of Galilee , the resurrected Jesus appeared to them where the old fisher men were netting on the water. But they didn't recognize that it was Jesus. Jesus called out to them, "Friends! Have 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 there were so many fish.

Then the disciple John said to Peter, "It is the Lord." As soon as Peter heard this, he wrapped his outer garment around him and jumped into the water and swam to the Lord. The other disciples followed the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. We can imagine this scene by studying the picture hanging in the fellowship hall.

When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals with some fish and bread warming on it. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have caught." Then Peter rushed to the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153 of them, but even with so many fish, the net was not torn. Jesus invited them, saying, "Come and have breakfast." And they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the broiled fish. They had a pleasant breakfast with Jesus on the shore. If you visit Galilee , you can see the place where Jesus shared breakfast with them. Someone has erected a statue there, of Jesus saying, "Do you love me?"

Today's scripture reading is from the scene right after breakfast. The Lord asked Peter three times: "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" And when Peter replied, "Yes, Lord. You know that I love you," Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs," three times. In this conversation between the Lord and Peter, we can find three dimensions of love. The Risen Christ breathed a new spirit into Peter's heart with love. That love became a source of power for Peter throughout his life.

First, there is self-love which we should discard for deeper love.

My two-year-old grandson Benjamin loves blackberries. He loves to fill his mouth with blackberries and doesn't even chew them. He just squashes them once with his tongue and swallows. And Benjamin also loves toys. When he receives a new toy as a gift, he plays with it all day long. He loves everything he loves. But the problem is that he doesn't know how to consider others beside himself. When he was invited to his friend's birthday party, he wanted to play with the birthday boy's presents first. This kind of love is self-centered love. This love is childish love.

Ann Willis and Marvin Bristow are staying at the Cheyenne Health Care Center for the time being. Last Tuesday I visited them early in the afternoon. Marvin always smiles and says, "I have a good wife. She takes good care of me. My memory is not enough good so I don't know what day it is today." They wait for visitors all day long.

When I visited Ann, she was holding a stuffed animal, a puppy, in her arm. She said, "This puppy is my best friend; he doesn't talk back and disobey." "I have no complaints, the food is good and they treat me well. I don't have to cook and do dishes. But there is

no place like home. I want to go back home.” Ann loves her stuffed puppy. That is self-love. Self-love is important for strengthening self-esteem. But if we remain in self-love without growing, it could descend into selfish love.

Children want to be the center of attention. Children owe nobody anything. Their attitude is to get all they can but they have little obligation to any person. They rarely think of what they owe their parents or the society in which they live. Children are completely self-centered. They live in a world that revolves around them. Childish people are petty, and pettiness is immature selfishness. The cry of the childish person is, “Do something for me! Help me! Give me something!”

Self-love is a childish love. Life brings no greater blessing than a child, obviously; children are wonderful. But it is a heartbreaking tragedy when a child never develops physically, mentally, socially, emotionally, or spiritually.

Second, there is mutual love that needs to be confirmed, reconfirmed and committed to each other.

We learn mutual love as we grow up. Do you love me? I love you too. This is mutual love. I was asked to officiate a wedding for a young man and woman by their parents. Unfortunately the young couple does not attend church. So they decided to hold the wedding at a hotel. The bride understands the traditional Christian wedding. But the groom doesn't understand the Christian wedding. The groom said to me, “Since I'm not a Christian, the Christian wedding doesn't mean anything to me. Don't use the Bible, vows, or prayers for the wedding.”

It was bewildering to me. I persuaded him, “You know that we are living in a western culture. If we do not follow the way of American culture, people may feel that your wedding is strange or absurd. I don't want people to feel that way about your wedding. And plus if you don't want vows, that is no way to have wedding. In that case, I will not be the officiant of your wedding.”

Marriage is completed by this mutual love. The consents of marriage and vows are the core of mutual love. Without the commitment of mutual love, a marriage cannot be continued. You have to discard childish love, selfish love and self-centered love. You have to respect and cherish each other. That is the meaning of marriage. In many occasions, mutual love is worthy and wonderful and vigorous. Mutual love is not only feeling good but also spiritual.

Thirdly, there is responsive love, which Jesus calls us to.

Most of our loves are mutual and conditional. We love those who are lovable. I love you and you love me, and then everything is O.K. But Jesus our Lord asks and teaches us another love which is responsive love. Jesus asked Peter, “Do you love me more than these?” Peter said to Him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Then,

Jesus said to him again, “Feed my lambs.” To feed Lord’s lambs is to love Him in another way, which is responsive love.

To be a father or mother is to be a responsive loving person. Children owe their parents’ responsive, sacrificing love. To be a mature person is to love responsively, that is to love others, not only in a mutual relationship but also in community. To enter into marriage life is to love mutually and responsively, and to love your partner, but also your children, family, and community.

Responsive love is a mature love. A mature person is big-spirited, magnanimous, tender, concerned, committed to others in goodwill. When the mature adult weeps, it is most often for others. The mature adult appreciates approval, but works on even when there is no recognition. The mature adult is saturated with the spirit of gratitude, filled with the spirit of compassion.

John F. Kennedy once said, “Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country.” That is responsive love. The measuring stick for maturity is love. What kind of love do you have -- self-love, mutual love or responsive love? “Do you love me? Then feed my lambs!” We feed the Lord’s lambs through our responsive love. Remember that we should love our neighbors because that is the way to love Jesus.

May the Spirit of Christ’s resurrection breathe love into your heart and life!