

***Do You Love Me?***  
**John 21:15-19**  
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**Susquehanna Annual Conference – Celebration of Ministry Service**  
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In a few short weeks, I have the privilege of marrying a fantastic woman named Hannah Pratt. When we started dating, we began by asking each other the easy questions, the type of questions that allowed us to get to know one another. Questions like: *what's your favorite color, what high school did you attended, what are the names of your parents, and what are your hobbies?* As the interest grew, the intensity of the questions increased. *What are your pet-peeves, what brings you joy, what are your dreams, what are you looking for in a future spouse?* [Ask: Do you remember those days?] *These are the types of questions that open up our vulnerability with one another.*

These are the questions that led us to eventually ask a very important question, *do you love me?*

As you can imagine, every time I sensed Hannah asking this question either verbally or nonverbally, I was quick to respond or show that: *Of course, I love you, Hannah.*

Even though I am not yet a married man, I recognize this may be one of the most important questions we will ask each other in marriage. I have realized that it's easier to tell Hannah with my words that I love her, then showing her with my actions. Sometimes I get distracted or become selfish, and I neglect to show her love more than my mere words. Hannah does not just want my response, but she desires to sense my dedication and commitment. I am continuing to learn how necessary it is to show and express my love for Hannah.

Jesus also wants to know how much we love him. In wanting to know how committed and dedicated one of his disciples was to Him, Jesus pulled him aside and asked him a provocative question. "Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?'"<sup>1</sup> Before we jump all too quickly into this familiar scripture passage (one that we have heard preached before or preached ourselves from time to time), we have to pause and remember the

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<sup>1</sup> John 21:15

emotional experience Peter has just had. Three years prior to being faced with this powerful question, Peter was minding his own business and doing what he did best, fishing. Jesus had invited him and his brother to “come and see”<sup>2</sup> all that Jesus was going to do, and be a part of. Peter left the comfort of the waters to follow a path in uncharted territory. For a few years, Peter witnessed Jesus love and amaze people.

Peter witnessed Jesus turn barrels of water into barrels of wine at the wedding. He saw Jesus provide abundantly for 5,000+ people who were amazed at Jesus’ teachings. Peter saw Jesus love people like the Samaritan Woman and bring back to life his friend Lazarus. Moments before hearing this powerful question from Jesus, Peter witnessed him provide an abundant number of fish when Peter and his pals were casting their nets into the Sea.

Yet, Jesus asks, “Do you love me more than these [miracles]? Do you love me more than these things that you have seen me do? Do you love me more than these?”

For Jesus knew how hard it was for Peter and his disciples to love. The incredible miracles Peter had experienced alone did not propel him to remain in love with Jesus. And we can’t forget that days ago, in the panic, chaos, and confusion of the accusations against Jesus and the impending trials and crucifixion, Peter was asked if he was one of Jesus’ disciples.<sup>3</sup> Peter denied even knowing Jesus. Peter denied his love for Jesus.

This has been Peter’s experience leading up to this powerful question *do you love me* that came out of Jesus’ mouth.

This question that Jesus asks Peter is one of the most important questions ever asked, and one that needs to be asked more. In our season as a denomination, in the season of our nation, even in the season of our own personal journeys, this may be the most important question we ask each other. ***Are we people who are in love with Jesus?*** If Jesus was before us and asked, “Do you love me?” how would we respond. “Are we people who are in love with Jesus? Are we people who are in love with Jesus?”

But before we answer too quickly, we have to think about what Jesus is *not* asking. Jesus is not asking: have you grown my church? Have you served faithfully every day? How much are

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<sup>2</sup> John 1:39

<sup>3</sup> John 18:17

you accomplishing? How many people take you seriously? Have you shown results in your church? Instead the question is a little more real and a little more personal, Jesus is asking, *do you love me? Do you love me?*

Are we people who are in love with Jesus? This question is the root of our call as ministers, lay leaders, as beloved children of God.

To begin answering this question “Are we people who are in love with Jesus?”, we must first remember a simple truth. The simple yet profound truth that Jesus first loved us! God loves God’s beloved people, and God wants us to not forget that we were first loved by God.

When I was a young child, about *this* tall, I remember learning a familiar children’s song. An incredible woman of God named Mrs. K taught me this song, and I can still picture her singing it to us.

It went something like this: (singing this) *Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. Little ones to him belong; they are weak, but he is strong.*

Inviting everyone to sing with me: *Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me! The Bible tells me so.*

Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves you! Yes, Jesus loves us! The Bible tells us so! Sometimes especially during moments of ministry and life, we need to be reminded of this simple and yet profound truth of Jesus. That Jesus loves us, and there’s nothing we can do about it.

Retirees who are nearing the end of your ministry journey, Jesus loves you! Current pastors serve in the midst of our unsteady world, Jesus loves you! Laity, living out the good news inside and outside of the church walls, Jesus loves you! Bishop Park, leading our beloved annual conference during this season, Jesus loves you!

Do you love me? Do you love Jesus? The very nature of this question is one of love and grace. Peter had just denied being a part of this Jesus movement. He didn’t want to be recognized with Jesus. And now, despite or perhaps because of this denial, Jesus is giving Peter another chance. He is asking Peter: do you love me? And if so, please follow me and feed my lambs. For Jesus to even ask Peter, for Jesus to even want to be near, or around Peter is a true act of love and grace.

Tonight Jesus is again asking us: do you love me? And he is asking this question through the lens of the cross of grace!

So, are we people who are in love with Jesus? Well, we begin by naming that Jesus first loved us. Now, how else can we answer this probing question for us tonight? What does it mean to be people who are in love with Jesus?

Are we people who are truly seeking God to consume our entire life? "Are we people who desire to dwell in God's presence, listen to God's voice, to look at God's beauty, and to taste fully God's infinite goodness?"<sup>4</sup> Are we people who seek Jesus first about everything else? Are we people who are more in love with Jesus than with the church? Are we people who value our relationship with Jesus over our paycheck, reputation, status, or popularity? Are we people who have an intimate/growing relationship with Jesus? Are we people who listen to God's voice?

If we are honest, there are moments in our ministry, families, and everyday lives that make it difficult for us to love Jesus. Other things take priority, other items grab our attention more, and our love for Jesus takes the back seat. Or maybe, Jesus doesn't get a seat at all. This is less of an indictment and more of a moment of humble honesty. Sometimes in the midst of a demanding week, I neglect to pray. Sometimes in the midst of a chaotic situation, I neglect to read scripture more than for sermon preparation. Sometimes when it seems like I'm journeying through life, I forget about Jesus all together. There are moments where I forget that Jesus loves me.

Yet, Jesus is asking in a moment of love and grace, if we are people who are in love with Jesus? Are we people who in the midst of chaos, look to Jesus. Are we people in the midst of the joys of ministry point all the glory back to Jesus? Are we people who can accept the grace of God in our moments of denial?

This love for Jesus is something that should define our entire life. This love is sacrificial, it's a love that requires all of us. A love that is willing to surrender all. A love that leads us to follow Jesus in the wilderness, feed his lambs, tend his sheep, and a love that could mean laying down our very lives for Jesus.

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<sup>4</sup> Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 43.

"An eight-year-old boy had a younger sister who was dying of leukemia. He was told that without a blood transfusion, she would die. His parents explained to him that his blood was probably compatible with hers and if so, he could be the blood donor. They asked him if they could test his blood. He said "Sure." So they did, and it was a good match. Then they asked would he give his sister a pint of blood... as it could be her only chance of living. He said he would have to think about it overnight. The next day he went to his parents and said he was willing to donate his blood. They took him to the hospital, where he was put on a gurney beside his six-year-old sister, both of them hooked up to IVs. A nurse withdrew a pint of blood from the boy which was put into his sister. The boy lay on his gurney in silence while his blood dripped into his sister until the doctor came over to see how he was doing, then the boy opened his eyes and asked "How soon until I start to die?"<sup>5</sup>

This young boy although ignorant of medical procedures, grasped the profound nature of love. He was willing to lay down his life for his sister. Are we people who are in love with Jesus, who are willing to lay down our entire lives for his mission? Are we people who when we say yes to Jesus, we surrender everything to Jesus.

This love that we have is a love from Jesus, and a love that propels us to love God and others better. This love keeps us centered in our tasks as ministers. This love reminds us it's not about us. This love helps us engage in difficult conversations because we realize that we're all seeking to **love** Jesus better. This love propels us to love difficult people, love people who think differently than us, and love those who are in need.

The moment we stop loving is a moment when it all becomes about us. But Jesus asks Peter this question to remind him and us now that the key to it all is about loving Jesus. So are we people who are in love with Jesus today?

Our Retirees [look to them/address them personally] this evening, first I want to thank you. Thank you for your wisdom and leadership through your countless years of ministry. Thank you for paving the way for young clergy like me. Thank you for showing us through your mentoring and relationships what it means to love Jesus with your whole heart and life.

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<sup>5</sup> Anne Lamott, Bird by Bird

But I have a request for you, your job is not done! As you move onto your next season of life, keep asking yourselves if you are in love with Jesus and keep asking us the same question. Please help those of us who are the active laity and clergy to stay in love with Jesus. Please keep asking us if we are people who are in love with Jesus?

Our ordinands, congratulations on your upcoming ordination tomorrow! You did it! You have many many more years of ministry ahead, and I'm convinced that the most important thing for you is to stay in love with Jesus. Fight any temptation to gain popularity, status, spotlight – rather, fight to stay in love with the one who called you to leave everything and come and follow. Continue to ask each other, if you are people who are in love with Jesus?

Too us all, the beloved people of the Susquehanna Annual Conference, we become one, we become unified through our relationship and love of Jesus. Our shared love of Jesus will be the unifying power in our body. We are unified in our ever growing, intentional, focused love of Jesus. Let us keep asking one another if we are people who are in love with Jesus.

Let me ask us one more time: *Are we people who are madly, unapologetically in love with our incredible and gracious Savior Jesus Christ? (repeat)*

In this moment, we are going to respond by singing the chorus of *Jesus, We love you*. May this be a moment to respond to Jesus, and share how you are seeking to love him more! But as you do, remember that this love that is Jesus is asking us for is a love that is rooted in his love for us, and love that will demand all of us!