**FEED MY SHEEP**

September 1, 2013

John 21:1-19

Key Verse 21:17c “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.’”

In the synoptic gospels, Jesus gave the disciples the great commission. Matthew 28:19,20 says, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Mark 16:15 says, “He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.’” Luke 24:47-48 says, “Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.” Even though it is not explicitly stated, we can find the John’s gospel version of the great commission in this verse: Feed my sheep.

After Jesus was crucified on the cross and raised from the dead, Peter and the disciples went back to Galilee. They did not know what to do without Jesus. The only thing they could do was the old fishing business. So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. How would the disciples feel? They were in deep despair because they failed both in following Jesus and in the world. Peter especially felt so because he denied Jesus three times.

It was on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias. One morning three years before, Peter was washing his nets there. Though he had worked all night, he had caught nothing. He was tired and hungry. He had no dream. Even though he worked hard every day, it was meaningless and he had no direction of life. He was tired of living. At that moment, Jesus, who had finished speaking to the crowd, said to Simon, “Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.” It was a ridiculous thing to do, for fishing was done at night. But when Simon and his coworkers did so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. Through this event Peter experienced the almighty power of Jesus. In the past Peter was a man of no dream. He had just worked and lived because others worked and lived.

But his dream was born when Jesus showed him his almighty power through the great catch of fish. A dream sprouted in his heart. Later it grew. In his imagination he thought that Jesus would establish a messianic kingdom on earth and rule the world and he would become a prime minister. This dream prompted him to make an immediate decision to follow Jesus. When Jesus entered Jerusalem, it seemed that his dream was finally fulfilled. But Jesus was crucified on the cross and his dream was broken into pieces. Three years of following Jesus seemed to have been a vain attempt. Moreover, he was disappointed in himself, for he had denied his Master three times. He never believed that he would betray his Master. Because of this, he could not forgive himself. He was in deep despair. Still, he was too young to die and too despairing to live. So he and his fellows went out to fish. But that night they caught nothing. To Peter, everything seemed to be over. But to the Risen Christ, it was a new start to help Peter. As Jesus had promised to meet them in Galilee after his resurrection, he went and stood in the breeze on the shore of Lake Galilee. But his disciples, who were returning from their fishing trip, could not recognize that it was Jesus who was standing there. They were too tired.

Look at verse 5. “He called out to them, ‘Friends, haven’t you any fish?’ ‘No,’ they answered.” Jesus was ready to help them restore their immediate failure in fishing. He said, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.” It was not a proper time for fishing. But they obeyed anyway. Then, they made a great catch of fish. Their net was full of large fish, numbering 153. What a catch! This is the second time Jesus helped Peter restore his failure in catching fish. Generally, people reward those who succeed and punish those who fail. Jesus knew that Peter had failed both as a fisherman and as his disciple. But Jesus did not mind. Rather, he wanted to restore him from his failure by helping him catch a large number of fish, so that he might be restored from his failures and start a new life. There is no failure in Jesus. Whoever comes to him after much failure and despair, our Lord Jesus is ready to restore. In Jesus we can have a new hope and a new life. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”

Look at verse 10. “Jesus said to them, ‘Bring some of the fish you have just caught.’” The Risen Christ, though he was ennobled and glorified through his resurrection, cooked breakfast for his disciples, who were hungry and tired. The Risen Christ said, “Come and have breakfast.” It is amazing that the Risen Christ cooked breakfast like a mother. Jesus’ most beloved disciple, Peter, betrayed him three times. So Jesus should punish him. At least he should stare at him in order to embarrass him. Rather, the Risen Christ prepared breakfast and had a beautiful beach party for Peter and the disciples.

When Jesus said, “Come and have breakfast,” none of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew that it was the Lord. They knew that it was the Lord who was crucified and rose again from the dead. They knew that it was the Risen Christ who prepared breakfast for them and said, “Come and have breakfast.” When they met the Risen Jesus, their failures and despair and all bad images were gone, gone with the wind. They felt as if they were in heaven. This scene of the beach party is full of grace. It was an unforgettable love feast. Later, John associated this love feast at the beach with the heavenly feast in Rev 3:20b, “...I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.” After eating the breakfast which the Risen Christ had prepared, the disciples’ spiritual eyes were opened and they could see the glorious Risen Jesus.

What did Jesus do after breakfast? Did he just shake hands and say good-bye and go into heaven? No. Look at verse 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.’” Here we learn two things.

**First**, Jesus wanted to restore a love relationship with Peter. Jesus asked Peter, “Do you love me?” This was really a hard question for Peter to answer because he had denied Jesus three times; so he could not say, “I love you.” Instead, he said, “You know that I love you.” It meant, “You know my heart.” It was true that Peter loved Jesus. Once he said, “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.” But Peter, who had loved his master passionately, denied him three times during the time of his Passion. Why did he fail? It was because his love for Jesus arose from his self-confidence and his emotional feelings. Then how could he say, “You know that I love you”? It was because he was sure that Jesus still loved him through the beach party. When Jesus visited Peter and cooked breakfast for him and said to him, “Come and have breakfast,” his heart melted with the love of God. When Jesus gave him bread and fish again and again, as soon as he had emptied his dish, Peter could remember Jesus' teaching: “I am the vine; you are the branches.” At that moment, the love of God that had been planted in him by Jesus sprouted out and blossomed to the full. Now he felt as if he were in the third heaven. Peter experienced the divine love of Jesus to the full. Peter accepted Jesus’ love first. So he could say, “You know that I love you.” Here we learn that the way to love Jesus truly is first to accept God’s love into our hearts. 1 John 4:19 says, “We love because he first loved us.” Everybody wants to be loved by someone. But weak human beings cannot love others without first knowing God’s love. When one does not know God’s love, one feels unloved, even though one is much loved. Praise Jesus who restored his love relationship with Peter in this way.

In the past, Peter did not know what kind of person he was. He had never admitted that he was a sinner. When Jesus rebuked him or gave him some training, he would say in his heart, “Jesus, you cannot crush me like that. You don’t know me.” He thought that he was a great man and he could preach the gospel to thousands of people and convert them all at once. But when Peter made a love relationship with Jesus, he began to realize how terrible a sinner he was. He confessed in 1 Peter 2:24, “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.” This is a quotation from the prophet Isaiah, but Peter was applying it to himself.

**Second**, Jesus wants Peter to feed God’s sheep. Jesus asked the same question, “Do you love me?” three times. The first two times, Peter answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” When Jesus asked the same question a third time, Peter was hurt. But he gave the same answer: “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” There is no other record of Jesus pressing anyone in this way. But this time, Jesus was very serious. Each time Jesus asked, “Do you love me?” he also commanded, “Feed my sheep,” or “Take care of my sheep.” Jesus commanded each time to feed sheep, because we can express our love for Jesus when we feed God’s sheep; we can maintain our love relationship with Jesus when we feed his precious sheep. Up till then, Peter had been Jesus’ sheep. He had received much love from Jesus. Jesus bore all his weaknesses. In this way, Jesus wanted to show him shepherd life in the hope of raising him as a shepherd for God’s flock. Now Peter was not supposed to remain as Jesus’ permanent sheep, but become a shepherd. Now Peter has to imitate Jesus who loved him to the end. He has to receive many rejections. He has to receive many wrong telephone numbers. He has to bear with many sheep who blow up for no reason.

The image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd is indeed glorious and beautiful. Actually God gave us the innate image of Jesus. But because of our sins, we become beggars of love. Now the image of Jesus in Peter would be fully restored by shepherding God’s flock. God’s inmost desire is to conform us to the likeness of his Son Jesus; the image of the good shepherd.

Before I fed sheep, I never understood Jesus’ love and my shepherd’s love. I didn’t know what “Jesus’ shepherd heart” meant. But since I fed sheep, I began to realize how much Jesus and my shepherd bore with me and loved me. My sheep often remind me how stubborn and proud I was and how my shepherd bore with me patiently. God gradually restore the image of Jesus, the good shepherd when I fed God’s sheep. Let us not remain as permanent sheep but let us make a decision of faith to feed God’s flock through 1 to 1 Bible study so that all of us may have the image of Jesus, the good shepherd.

At this moment, let us hear Jesus call our name, “Simon son of John, Henry, do you love me? Then feed my sheep.” May God bless the new academic year to serve his precious sheep.