

“Assurance of God's presence” John 21:1-19 (5/4/25)

“Do you love me?” is one of the most difficult questions for a man. When a man hears this question from his wife or girlfriend, he gets nervous. “Why is she asking me this?” “Did I do something wrong?” “Is something going on today?” But actually, the answer to this question is simple. He can just say, “Yes, I love you.”

There are many reasons to ask this question, but the main reason why people ask this question may be wanting to have assurance. People ask, “Do you love me?” because they want to be sure of that love.

Assurance has always been a concern for me in my life. I was a deep thinker from a young age. I did not want to spend time and energy on something that was not eternal. That was why I was not very interested in making money. I thought I could not take money with me when I die, and I knew money doesn't last forever.

At that time, even my religion could not give me assurance. The Buddhism I knew taught me that I had to do religious practices hard to reach Buddha's level by following his teachings. But when I looked at great monks and even my parents, I wondered: “How can we say that a person became like Buddha?” “And who decides that?” I questioned whether a human can really reach Buddha's level. The more I tried to live as a good Buddhist, the more this question stayed with me. I tried to

follow Buddha's teachings seriously, even from a young age. I can kill bugs easily now, but even a few years ago, because of my Buddhist habit, I was uncomfortable killing bugs. I was comfortable when I caught the bugs and let them out the window. Buddha taught me not to kill even small life, so I was careful not to kill bugs. But still, I did not feel assurance in me even though I tried to follow Buddha's teaching well.

After thinking for a long time, I decided that letting people remember my name before I die was something eternal. Even after thousands of years, people remember the names of famous kings or those who did good things. So, I thought, if I lived a good life and people remembered my name in a good way, I would be using my life for something eternal. That was why, when I was living in China, I dreamed of learning traditional Chinese medicine and going to Africa for medical volunteer work.

But when I came to New Zealand and went to church, I talked with a pastor about this, and I realized my conclusion about assurance and eternal life was not perfect. The pastor asked me, "If you die and you disappear, what does it mean if only your name is left?" I realized that if I do not exist anymore, then whatever I leave behind has no meaning. Through life in the church, I got to know Jesus. I

learned, and I could have the assurance that I will live forever with Jesus because of Jesus' death and resurrection,

This assurance is the most important feature of Christianity. I do not know everything about other religions or philosophies, but from what I have experienced, other religions or philosophies teach people to do their religious practices to reach assurance. But Christianity teaches us to live with assurance already. We do not believe we go to a good place because we have reached a special level through religious practices. We believe that because Jesus died on the cross, our sinful nature also died, and because Jesus was risen again, we now live a new and eternal life. Living this new life after the resurrection is the core belief of Christianity.

Today's Scripture, the Gospel of John, was written during a very challenging time for Christians. There are different opinions, but most people believe it was written around AD 80–90. Christians were suffering in AD 70. The Roman Empire destroyed the temple in Jerusalem. Emperor persecution began, and Christians were jailed or killed for not worshipping the emperor. Those suffering and persecution made people not to believe in Jesus. It was very difficult to believe in Jesus during that time. And the suffering did not just happen outwardly like persecution. Inwardly, many wrong teachings and philosophies were mixed up with Christianity, and the

truth about Jesus became unclear. John wrote this Gospel to tell who Jesus was clearly and to give hope and assurance to Christians who were suffering.

From today's Scripture, especially in John 21, we can learn two things: First, we cannot have assurance through our own strength and efforts. Peter was a fisherman before he met Jesus. Historical records show that Peter owned at least one fishing boat. That means he was not just catching fish to survive. He was a professional fisherman who did fishing for the business. Peter's life was fishing. Today's Bible verses show this: Even though Peter had confessed that Jesus was Christ and the Son of living God and received authority from Jesus, Peter went back to fishing after Jesus died. But that night, In John chapter 21, Peter caught nothing. Even though Peter was a professional fisherman and fishing was his whole life, he failed. He could not have assurance of success by his own strength and efforts.

But when Peter met Jesus, he caught so many fish that the net almost broke. We need to understand this: Peter did not now have assurance in fishing; he gained assurance that Jesus was with him.

This event was very similar to the first time Peter met Jesus. Do you remember the first time when you met your love? I still remember the first day I met my wife. We remember it a little differently, but I still clearly remember her walking

into the dessert cafe on that rainy day.

Even though Peter denied Jesus three times and felt like his dreams were gone after Jesus died, he could never forget the first time he met Jesus. In John 21, when Peter pulled up the net, he knew for sure: “It’s Jesus!” Through Jesus, Peter had assurance that the risen Lord was there with him.

This story also might give hope and assurance to Christians who lived under the Roman Empire’s persecution. The early church Christians believed in Jesus even though they were persecuted, which means they had the experience of encountering Jesus. I surely believe that each Christian in the early church had memories of the first time they experienced the presence of Jesus in their spirits. When their lives became challenging because of the persecution, the story of Peter in John would remind the early church Christians of the first time they met Jesus.

This is the same for us. When life’s problems and issues make us unsure of God’s presence, let’s look at Jesus. Like Peter and the early Christians, we can find the assurance that God is with us through Jesus.

Second, the other thing that we can learn from John chapter 21 is Jesus is the one who gives us assurance. In today’s Bible Scripture, Jesus asked Peter three times, “Do you love me?” Many people have talked about the different Greek words for

love here, but today, I want to think about Peter's feelings. When Jesus asked the third time, the Bible says: "Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' and he said to him, 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.'"

Jesus knew everything. He did not ask Peter because He was not sure about Peter's love for Jesus. And I do not think Jesus asked three times to make Peter feel awkward for denying Jesus three times.

If my wife asked me seriously three times, "Do you love me?" I would start to think a lot. "Why is she asking again?" "What kind of answer does she want?" But like I said at the beginning, the answer is: "Yes, I love you." If I say, "I'm not sure," then I probably will not get any food for dinner that night.

Through this question and answer, Peter gained assurance that he loved Jesus. Peter had denied Jesus three times. That fact was a serious burden in his heart. He probably did not feel worthy to say, "I love Jesus." He was not sure of his relationship with Jesus. But Jesus gave him three chances to say, "Yes, I love you, Lord." Peter felt sad about the repeated question, but he still said clearly, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus gave this assurance to Peter so that he could move on from his past and live as a true servant of God.

God is with us. That is the gospel. More than anything else, we Christians live with the assurance that God is with us. Because Jesus died for us on the cross and defeated death through His resurrection, we can live knowing that God is with us. Our weaknesses or situations may make our faith weak. But Jesus still wants us to say, “I love you, Lord.” Because when we say it, we find the assurance of God’s presence. This week, instead of looking at our problems, let’s ask ourselves, “Do I love Jesus?” and answer, “Yes, I love Jesus.” Through this confession, may the assurance of God’s presence be full in our hearts. Amen.