

The Two Questions that He Keeps Asking

After the resurrection, Jesus returns to the disciples and sets his attention on Peter. You remember Peter. He's the cussing disciple. The sword wheeling, water stumbling, denier whose tongue sprinted a few miles ahead of his brain on any given Sunday.

Jesus gives the disciples a little fishing advice that produces a record catch and then Peter jumps out of the boat leaving the haul to his buddies. That is **SO** Peter, isn't it?

In the middle of this breakfast He asks Peter three times: "Peter, son of Jonah? Do you love me?"

The first time he asks, "Do you love me more than these?"

This is where I could have used a little more narrative information from the writer John. He obviously must have been gesturing to the fish, or the boats, his favorite lures, the disciples, or the water. We don't know. But I like that we don't know. It leaves a mystery and every time I think about it, I think about my own "more than these" things.

I open up my retirement balance sheet. And I hear Him whisper, "Do you love me more than these?"

I open the refrigerator. He whispers again, "Do you love me more than these?"

I think about my family and friends. It gets deadly serious as He whispers, "Do you love me more than these?"

Just the question, "Do you love me?" What a soul searching question it is! Do I really love Him. I mean, hail or high water, do I love Him? Do I love Him when I am broke, mistreated, demoted, deleted, disparaged, rejected... Do I love

Him?

The second question comes after Jesus infers that he (Peter) is going to die. (Note to reader: You, too, will die) Peter looks over at John, perhaps hoping to change the subject. No one wants to talk about their own death. He turns to John and asks, "Hey Jesus, what about John?"

Jesus then says, "What is that to you?" In other words, "Peter, stop looking around. I'm talking about you and you only right now." I think the question inside the question is this: "Do you trust me?"

Jesus is asking me that same question. "Do you trust me?"

Those two questions:

Do you love me?

Do you trust me?

Those are the questions he whispers to me and you every day.

When He sees us fretting, anxious, conflicted, and disappointed by our careers, our lives, our future, our kids, our marriage, our finances, EVERYTHING.

He's asking those two questions.

Stop reading this for a moment and hear Him whisper to you:

Do you love me?

Do you trust me?

Do you love me?

Do you trust me?

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Do you love me?

Do you trust me?

Do you love me?

Do you trust me?

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Do you trust me?

Do you love me?

Do you trust me?

I don't know where you are, but your love and trust fascinates Him. It's why He created you. He created you so that He could love You and take care of You. I want to see you and me grow up so that we can enter into a relationship of love and trust. He wants both of those from you, more than He wants you to sing beautifully, speak in tongues, heal the sick, or achieve greatness in His Name. Getting your theology right about free-will, Calvinism, or how many angels can dance on the head of a pin— none of that is in the same area code of these two important questions.

He wants our love and He wants our trust.

So do you love Him?

Do you trust Him?

A Sacred Connection

The child arrives on the planet and a new daddy shouts, and the grandparents weep with joy, but the mother is the first to see her child deeply. Children are born and you don't have to teach a mother or child how to feel love. They bring their love with them.

She sees her baby and realizes that the old saying is true— babies come through us but not from us. And God whispers the words He always whispers following another stroke of wonder: "It is good." He created the child and He created the relationship. There is a sacred connection between mother and

child.

And the journey begins on that first day of life and the journey is filled with a vast collection of memories:

The first birthday cake

Mud pies

First steps

Bike rides on Christmas mornings

Lines on the door frame celebrating growth

Time out in the corner of a kitchen

A sudden illness followed by floods of concern

Healing and overwhelming relief

T-ball games

Goldfish funerals

Messy rooms

Adolescent brooding

Consoling heartbreaks

Failures and successes

ACTs And SATs and waiting nervously for results

Unexpected tears upon the realization that the journey into adulthood would soon be over.

The mother and the child

Their connection constantly changing and shifting over 17 years.

And as they back out of the driveway, boxes and memories stuffed away in the trunk, one last time they are off. This time not to camp, or a game, or a weekend but rather to a world of adventure that mothers and father release them to experience. They'll be back again and again- but the journey has begun. Their daily presence is gone.

But not the love.

A mother's love lasts, from birth, to childhood, through the teen years and beyond...

Endlessly unfolding...

The love never changes.

It is held in the mighty hands of Jesus.

Sometimes It's Hard to Sing

Every now and then, pain steals something so important to us. External forces or internal conflicts arise and over time, we discover that we have lost our song. How is it possible to sing when our hearts are heavy and our hope wanes?

You lose a friend to cancer. You are unjustly attacked. A child turns his back on you. Your heart is broken by the one person who promised to be with you until death. You lose a job, a dream or a destiny.

If that's where you've been or where you are, allow me to share a little blues from an old songbook called Psalms:

"By the rivers of Babylon— there we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion. There we hung up our lyres on the poplar trees... how can we sing in a faraway land."

Psalms 137:1-2 & 4

It happens.

Our song is gone.

Psalms 137 is a snapshot in the story of God's people. We see life knocking the wind out of their lungs and now they enter into bondage on the wrong side of Babylon's rivers. The songwriter asks a question we ask ourselves: "How can you sing in the middle of defeat and loss?"

In the seams of this songbook called Psalms, we hear deep guttural cries of the brokenhearted. We've all been there. Maybe it's a friend, maybe it's a family member, an accountability partner or a maybe it's you. We have all experienced a time when we turn off the music because darkness flooded into the cracks of our souls. The Bible is filled with these dark moments. They are not censored out and hidden obscurely. They are front and center. Why? *Maybe* it's because God wants us to know that in our darkest times, we enter into the fellowship of strugglers. We are not alone. We've never been alone. There's one thing for sure in this life: none of us gets a pass on adversity.

There is nothing more healing during a time of pain and sorrow than to connect with someone you love and hear the words "Me too." It's so simple! To find someone who's willing to admit that they struggle just as you struggle becomes an amazing healing agent. It takes the sting from the pain we face. We often find that our dirges become anthems of grace.

If you've lost your song I want to invite you:

- Sing your way out of it, even if it means singing the blues. (Psalm 30:11)
- Thank God for what you do have and don't focus on scarcity. (Philippians 4:6)
- As much as you'd prefer to climb under a rock, connect with someone who can support you. (Ecclesiastes 4:10-12)
- Don't look for the blame. It's a fool's errand. (Genesis 3:12)
- Rejoice in knowing that this event or circumstance will strengthen your character.
- Trust God's work in you. (Philippians 1:6)
- Do not internalize. Let yourself off the hook. (Romans 1:8)
- Be mindful of your body. Rest, nourish, and breathe deep. (Psalm 46:10)
- Don't just pray for escape, pray for God's glory to be revealed in the midst of it all. (2 Corinthians 12:9)
- Don't get paranoid. There isn't a target on your back. Really. (Romans 8:31)

Finally, I want to challenge all of us on the struggle bus to pray honestly. God hates a fake smile as much as anyone. Speak the truth. Make it plain. Don't hold back. God is not shaken by your anger or emotions. He's a God who wrestles.

"One bold message in the Book of Job is that you can say anything to God. Throw at him your grief, your anger, your doubt, your disappointment—he can absorb them all." Phillip Yancey

In despair, look for a friend and be a friend. A friend who can enter into the sacred space without breathing a word of advice or analysis. Aah... That is a friend to keep and to be. Chances are you know what to do. You just need someone to walk alongside you as you search for your song.

Sooner or later you'll find your jam.

The First Words of The Resurrected Jesus

The seven last words of Jesus have been lauded in songs and art. But when we consider the first words of Jesus after the resurrection, we discover what this new reality and commission looks like for believers.

Let's take a look at seven of the first sayings of Jesus. All of them are found in John 20.

1. **"Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"** (John 20:15)

These two questions are ones we should ask ourselves every day. What are the source of our tears? What exactly are we seeking?

Whenever you find tears in your eyes, especially unexpected tears, it is well to pay the closest attention. They are not only telling you something about the secret of who you are, but more often than not God is speaking to you through them of the mystery of where you have come from and is summoning you to where, if your soul is to be saved, you should go next." Frederick Buechner

Obviously I'm commandeering these questions as metaphors. There's truth there, though. We have many definitions for insanity but I would propose another: Insanity is not knowing what you are feeling and not knowing where you are going. That would be a start.

As believers, we call this mindfulness.

2. “Mary” (John 20:16)

May we be reminded that Jesus knows us, not only as the church, his bride, the mass of followers that began thousands of years ago. He knows our names. Each one of us. Jesus didn't lose his personal connection with Mary. He knows us by name as well. “Don't be afraid, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by your name. You are mine.” Isaiah 43:1

As believers, we call this identity.

3. “Go to my brothers and tell them.” (John 20:17)

He challenges us to do the same. As believers we should be constantly reminding each other that this resurrection life isn't some kind of brief, cryptic illusion. We must remind each other that this life is real and transforming. Throughout the walking of our days may we remind each other of the news we celebrated on Easter Sunday: “He's not there. He is alive!”

“The message of Easter is that God's new world has been unveiled in Jesus Christ and that you're now invited to belong to it.” – N.T. Wright

As believers, we call this mission.

4. “Peace be with you.” (John 20:19&21)

Isn't it awesome to know that Jesus greetings to us all after the resurrection is “Peace be with you”? When all was said and done, the denying betraying and doubting... Peace was still in the cards of the disciples and peace is pronounced over us, as well. When it comes to peace, He's the prince of it. Don't miss the blessing of

Shalom.

As believers, we call this blessing.

5. "Receive the Holy Spirit." (John 20:21)

If we want to be faithful to Jesus, we have to do what He says. We must receive the Holy Spirit. This means that we must move from confession to possession. We must be possessed by the Holy Spirit who will give us the power to do what we could not do before.

As believers, we call this anointing.

6. "If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you don't forgive them, they are not forgiven." John 20:23

The first sermon of the Resurrected Christ is forgiveness. It's always first on the agenda. Forgiveness is the opus, motif, rising action, grand finale and denouement of grace. It should be our foremost quest in all our relationships. We *must* forgive.

As believers, we call this grace.

7. "Stop doubting and believe." John 20:29

Just as He challenges Thomas, Jesus dares us to believe to trust him a little more, to love him a little more, to take one more step out of the boat and into the blue oceans.

"Every mental act is composed of doubt and belief, but it is belief that is the positive, it is belief that sustains thought and holds the world together." – Søren Kierkegaard

As believers we call this faith.

These sayings should get us on our way in the post-resurrection maze of discipleship: identity, mindfulness, mission, blessing, anointing, grace, faith...

It's Sunday!

It's Sunday.

And Jesus is with us!

His obituary is in the paper and, for *goodness sakes alive*, He is sitting at our breakfast table!

He is supposed to be behind a stone, flanked by Rome's finest. Dead, dead, dead...

But instead He's hungry and wants fish this morning!

And where has He been since the crack of dawn?

Did He go looking for better followers?

Did He go looking for a new set of men who would actually stick around in tough times?

No!

He went back to that ragtag bunch of deniers, doubters and deserters.

Think about that! The King of kings and Lord of lords is chasing after an unfaithful, deeply flawed family.

Jesus is with them. And He's with us too.

I don't know about tomorrow but I do know He'll be there.

Today, He made short work of the whole "death is the end" theory.

The sting is gone.

Wonder is forever upon us.

May we live with an eye toward that wonder.

May we refuse to be cynical about life or people.

Instead, today, may we experience the newness of everything as if it were our first day.

From today forward may we walk, sing, eat, work, play and write as if it were our first chance to get to do any of them.

And may we do everything with deep gratitude, expectation and dumbfounded surprise.

Today we get to begin again... because Jesus is with us.

It's Saturday

It's Saturday.

The tomb is sealed.

The guards are in position.

The sheep are scattered.

The light is gone.

There is nothing more than silence on the other end. These are the times when we look back and replay all our errors and missed opportunities. The words we should have said... The swords we should or should not have drawn. The flood of memories that we created. The feasts we should have savored at the time but were consumed by petty thoughts and motives that, on Saturday, seem so obtuse.

On Saturday we don't have answers. On Saturday we feel lost and duped. On Saturday we wonder if the loaves and fish were some sort of slight of hand and that lepers were not lepers after all.

But most of all, on Saturday, we just miss him. We wish we could see him laughing, telling stories, loving us unconditionally. On Saturday we pull out his clothes just for a last scent of the Divine.

On Saturday, we don't want to be around people that remind us of Him. On Saturday we long for one more embrace, one more story, even one more rebuke. Saturday— the day of emptiness, anger, and questions.

It's Saturday.

It's Friday

It's Friday and He's there... Suffering unimaginable traumas. He is deserted by fearful disciples, surrounded by tormentors, thieves, murderers, and religious provocateurs. Soldiers gaming over the final scant possessions of the Master of creation, ignore the darkening sky.

Jesus cries out: "My God, My God, Why have you forsaken me?"

On this holy day, God's beloved Son embodies the weight of every sin from the slightest tresspass to our greatest of atrocities.

And during this bloody sacrifice, a Holy God turns His back.

"He who knew no sin has become sin."

Jesus receives enough sour wine to moisten his tongue so that He could make *one grand and final announcement*. In the darkness of a cruel hill, Jesus shouts:

IT IS FINISHED!

This declaration is not a cry of defeat, despair and death. It is a glorious shout of victory! The masterpiece of redemption receives its final brushstroke. This is the pinnacle moment of grace that crushed the head of a conniving has-been and opened wide the passageway to salvation. The cross- once a vulgar, despicable symbol of shame, will soon top the roofs of churches and cathedrals. It will be displayed in homes and hospitals, bejeweled on necklaces and depicted in the greatest works of art and literature. And the three words Jesus shouted would now be the pronouncement of God's greatest transaction.

IT IS FINISHED.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:

"Glory to God in the highest,

And on earth peace."

There is peace once again in midst of the exchange.

It is dark.

It is unspeakable.

It is mysterious.

It is ENOUGH.

It is Friday.

It's Thursday Evening

It's Thursday evening. Darkness falls on a Middle Eastern city and a group of men gather around a table. Some men want answers, others want power, others conceal their furtive motives and plans, and still others resign to die.

Tonight is different. In the past, their times of feasting were filled with so much laughter and celebration that some had accused them of irreverence and drunkenness.

But not tonight.

The brutal events and encounters of a tumultuous week birthed weary hearts and uncertain minds. Even now the weight of man's rebellion settles on the back of the Son. He broke the bread, poured the wine and washed the feet of these first believers. How were they to know the import of this table? How could these twelve conceive that they would be the first to partake of this new and strangely anomalous feast?

This is my body...

This is my blood...

Remember this moment.

And I reply,

"I remember You, Lord Jesus Christ Son of God. I remember your constant longing for me to see You for who You really are. I remember the times when I had absolutely no one and You remained. You remained despite all the shameful wanderings that I created in the barrenness of my finite mind. You remained, even though I failed to rise above the waves of discontent that made a restful place in my heart. You remained, and the memories of every disappointing failure now are crushed under the weight of Your relentless love."

We hear the strange and unthinkable declaration: *“One will betray me.”*

And in so many ways we all have.

The perimeter of conspiracy around these men grows smaller.

The unseen war of angels and demons is thick, visceral and taut.

This night and the day to come will amass the climax of redemption.

The fate of generations, hence and to come, hangs on every move.

As the meal ends, the disciples sing.

The last supper, the last song...

The labor of grace begins.

It's Thursday evening.

It's Wednesday

It's Wednesday. Jesus remains in Bethany among friends. He is cloistered, away from the opinions of the multitude. There is peace in Bethany.

(May we all have a Bethany.)

This day is silent, until a worshipper enters carrying a

year's salary in the form of a rare and exquisite ointment ornately encased. The assembly watches in disbelief. The vessel is broken and the aroma of worship fills the room. She has become weary of logic, caution, safety, investments and prudence. This is not the time for such things.

This is a time for

over-the-top,

reckless,

radical

unstoppable,

extreme,

extravagant

WORSHIP

Her only desire is Jesus. Her desire is fulfilled. This moment in history leads her to squander her riches on the head and feet of the soon-scarred Savior. Her hands drip with the oil of adoration. In one moment, one woman worships Him more than most will in a lifetime.

This is not a tithe, as the Pharisee would desire.

This is not a special missions offering, as the disciples would desire.

This is not retribution, as the legalists would demand for her sin.

This is overwhelming.

This is abandon.

This is worship.

This is bliss.

This is EVERYTHING she had.

This is Wednesday.

It's Tuesday Evening

It's Tuesday evening...

Jesus returns to Bethany after a day of long and difficult conversations with friends and those who sought to destroy Him. He speaks of whitewashed tombs, of a darkened moon, of sudden separations, of a wedding and of a return. It's all in there—prophetic signs, passionate pleas, stern rebukes and mysterious parables. Today, His words and actions seem frenetic and unyielding. Like a dying king, He has much to say and little time.

The triumphant voices of two days ago has disappeared. The dissonance of ambiguity and conflict has taken on a life of its own.

The storms of opposition are organizing. Some would call it doom. Others, fate. But Jesus knows the story. This is divine consequence for the sake of us all.

*Tuesday speaks of destiny
Hidden today, soon all will see
Feet that walk toward the cross*

*with purpose counting not the loss.
I see him, hope of all my need
This week- the center of our creed.*

As the sun sets, one disciple walks into the shadows... into the company of nefarious saboteurs. The wheels of betrayal begin to move. There is no turning back for any of them. Passover approaches once again . . . a remembrance of doors marked with lamb's blood. The table is set. For another day. It's Tuesday evening.
