

Reflection from John 21:15-17
Given Sunday, May 22, 2022
for the First Baptist Church of McMinnville
Reverend Erika Marksbury, Senior Pastor

When they had eaten their meal, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" Peter said, "Yes, Rabbi, you know that I'm your friend." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

A second time Jesus put the question: "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter said, "Yes, Rabbi, you know that I'm your friend." Jesus replied, "Tend my sheep."

A third time Jesus asked him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me as a friend would?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked, "Do you love me?" a third time. So he said, "You know everything, Rabbi. You know that I am your friend." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."

—

Today I just wanted to remind us all of who we promise to be together.

Every relationship has terms - this is what I've been learning in therapy over the years - and sometimes, oftentimes, those terms are unspoken. We live by these terms intuitively, without having articulated them, without even knowing, sometimes, if our own understanding of the terms is the same as the understanding of the person with whom we're in relationship.

We have these expectations, and assumptions, of who and how we will be together with the people we care for, but we've never done what Jesus does with Peter here: hang back by the fire after everyone else has wandered away, and said: "You love me? Let's talk about this. Let's talk about what love means, what it offers, what it requires."

Here at church, we have articulated the terms. We don't have them posted anywhere, and we haven't actually signed on to them. But we speak them when people join this congregation in membership. We've had occasion to say them aloud on two Sundays so far this year, and we give thanks for that. Reading this passage from John's gospel made me think maybe we should revisit these terms again. Here's what we say:

We promise our faithful companionship to one another as together we seek to understand and live out the compassion we see in Christ's life. We will gently challenge each other, allowing ourselves and our community to be shaped and transformed by God's love for us and our love for each other. We will draw strength from each other as we strive together to live faithfully and love generously.

A promise we all say together can't say everything, of course. Rereading this, I'm realizing there are assumptions built in to

these terms, too, so I thought it might be important to state those directly.

We are trying: words like *seek to understand* and *striving* mean we don't have it all figured out. We will do it this life together well and we will not. But we are trying.

We are not the same: the phrase *we will gently challenge each other* means we will do things, feel things, understand things differently. We know that at the outset and we value that, believing those places of tension make us more whole.

We give up some power and control: *allowing ourselves and our community to be shaped and transformed* - those are code words for we will change. Some of what we want to see changed will change and some of what we love and hold dear will change and we will change, inevitably, along with it, hoping and working for change that makes us healthier, wiser, more loving, more responsive, more kind. But maybe not more comfortable.

We need each other: *living faithfully and loving generously* is the call, the heart of this promise we make, but those words are meaningless outside of relationship. We learn how to do that in relationship. We learn how to do that with and for each other, with and for our community, with and for the wider world. And we are all learning it together. There are lots of

people teaching me, and maybe you, how to do this, every day, just by being who they are. There are probably some you are teaching, too, just by being you who are.

We have each other: back to the beginning. *We promise our faithful companionship.* These are vows we make. We don't say, but we might as well: for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health. We need each other and we have each other. We can say this is true because of what is explicit, what is articulated, in this promise: Christ's life centers us. God's love shapes us.

And Christ's life, God's love - those are outpourings. Those are fullness born from a beloved identity that spills out and over so that every single one might also know themselves as beloved. We have each other because it is God that calls us together, because it is the model of Christ that we draw our practice from.

When there is nothing else, friends, this is good news. Even when there is everything else, this is good news. It is necessary work. It is a holy invitation. It is how we participate with God in making the beloved kin-dom real, here and now. We do it together. We need each other. We have each other. Thank you for that.

Amen.