

4 EASTER/MOTHER'S DAY
MAY 13/14, 2017

1st LUTHERAN, MARSHALL
PASTORS SCOTT & JULIE

2 Timothy 1:3-7; Psalm 145:1-9; John 21:1-17
Mama, Do You Love Me?

Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

(Text and pictures from the book Mama, Do You Love Me? By Barbara M. Joosse, illustrated by Barbara Lavalley, originally published: 1991)

You heard the Gospel story. The disciples are kind of stuck in neutral – Jesus is alive but he's not with them all the time – they seem to be unsure about what they should be doing, and a little lost as to where they should go. So Peter comes up with the perfect solution. He says to the gang: ***Let's go fishing!*** Well, they spend all night on the water, but get skunked. Then some landlubbing stranger yells at them to throw their nets on the **right** side of the boat...and a miracle occurs...

One disciple cries out, ***It's the Lord!*** reminding his brothers that Jesus pulled this same fishing trick at the beginning of his ministry. And yet, when the men get to shore, the Lord keeps himself from being recognized by sight. Only when he does something particular does their confusion clear up: he breaks the bread – and in doing so, the Lord is revealed.

It's an action that's very powerful for a couple of reasons:

First, it's very familiar to them. Think of all the meals they shared in those three years of their ministry journey.

Secondly, think of the **last** meal they shared when Jesus proclaimed, *the bread is my body and the wine is my blood...**given and shed for you***. In the middle of this crazy **between time**, Jesus anchors them with something from the past so that they might find strength to face an uncertain future.

Then the story suddenly shifts, as the Lord focuses his attention on Simon Peter. Three times the Lord asks him, "Simon, son of John, **do you love me?**" No one can say for certain **why** Jesus engages Peter in this manner – although some see the three questions as a way to set Peter free from the three times he denied knowing Jesus.

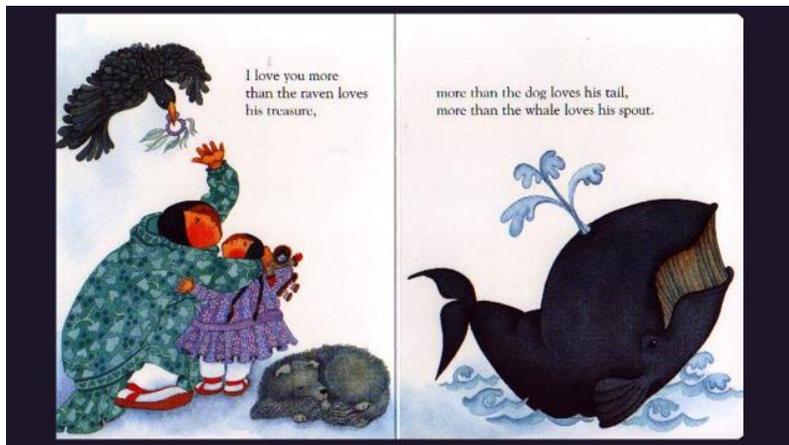
But what intrigues me most about their interchange, is that Peter never questions **Jesus'** love. I find that fascinating – and incredibly comforting all at the same time – because it flies in the face of the way that you and I can experience the challenges of life and love, disappointment and betrayal.

When we've upset, hurt, or betrayed someone who's important to us, our tendency is to immediately assume that that person will stop loving us – or, at the very least, love us a little less! It's our childhood fear of abandonment that always lies just below the surface of our spirits and very close to our wholly human hearts.

So it really should be Peter asking Jesus, **Lord, do you love me**?

When the Risen Lord asks, *Simon, do you love me?* what he's really asking is, *Do you love me...and all the people whom I call my own?* In other words, Who of my people would you call family? Who would you die for, who would you sacrifice for, who would you stand with through thick and thin? In short, asks Jesus, *Who do you love...for my sake?*

Mama, Do You Love Me? is the story about the interaction between an Inuit woman and her young daughter, following the mother's profession of undying love for her child. The girl probes the strength of her mother's promise with various imagined scenarios, from missteps to misbehaviors, and from defiance to danger. She wants to know if there's anything she might do that could exhaust her mother's love. The mother's response is pure gospel, beautifully reflecting the wonderful promise of God's love for us of all!



Says the little girl, Mama...do you love me?

Yes I do, Dear One.

How much?

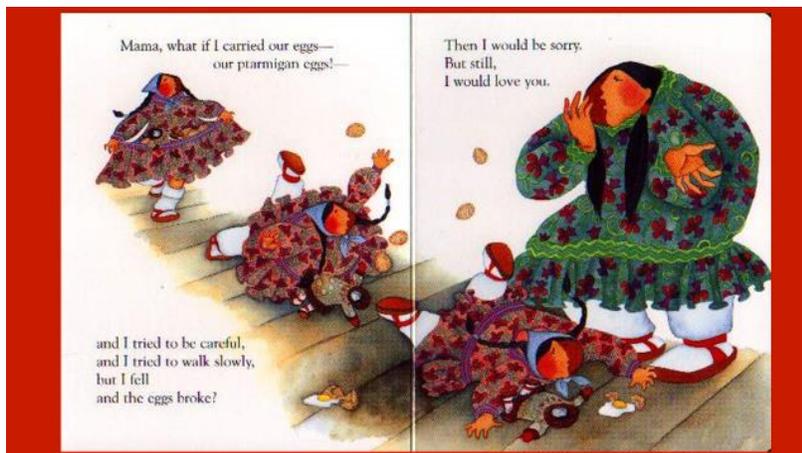
I love you more than the raven loves his treasure, more than the dog loves his tail, more than the whale loves his spout.

John 3:1-10, 16-17

3Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews.²He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.”³Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.”

⁴Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?”⁵Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.⁶What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’⁸The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

⁹Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?”¹⁰Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?...¹⁶“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.¹⁷“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

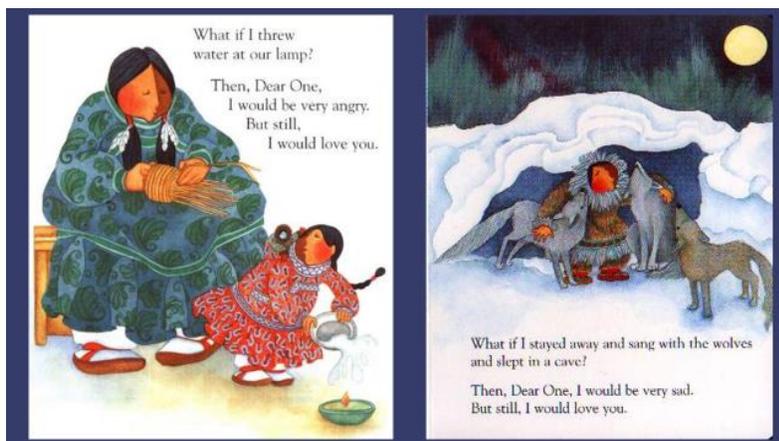


Would you love me, the girl asks her mom, *if I carried our eggs – our ptarmigan eggs! – and I tried to be careful, and I tried to walk slowly, but I fell and the eggs broke?* Says the mother in reply, *Then I would be sorry. But still, I would love you.*

One evening while the disciples were sailing on a stormy sea, the men were frightened – not only were they scared of the wind and the waves, but then they were terrified to see someone walking toward them **on the water!**

When Jesus got close enough for the disciples to see him, their fear abated. In fact, Peter asked if *he* could try walking on the water. The Lord said, ***Sure!*** So Peter crawled out of the boat and did fine while he kept his eyes on Jesus, but then he let his sense of reality invade that unnatural, illogical, improbable moment.

When he took his eyes off the Lord to look at the wind and waves, he became frightened and started to sink...he did his best, but it wasn't good enough. So the Lord reached out his hand and pulled Peter into the safety of the boat (Matt. 14:22ff) because he loved him.

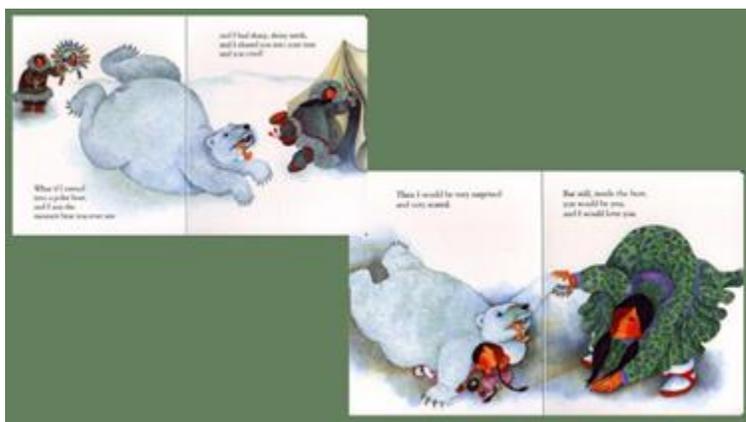


Says the little girl to her mother, *Mama, would you love me...if I threw water at our lamp?* Her mother replies, *Then, Dear One, I would be very angry. But still, I would love you.*

Mama, would you love me, asks the little girl...*if I ran away...and sang with the wolves and slept in a cave?* Says her mother, *Then, Dear One, I would be very sad. But still, I would love you.*

Jesus tells the story of a man who has two sons. One day the younger child says to his father, *I'm tired of living here – give me my half of your money – I want to see the world.* So he gets his money and leaves the country. Every day the father is sad while he watches the empty road to see if his son will come home. But the young man travels around having fun, going to parties, not caring about anything or anyone in life...

...until the day he discovers that all his money is gone. The best job he can find is...feeding pigs. In fact, he's so hungry that even the slop the animals eat starts to look good. So this younger brother decides to return home and apologize for his selfish behavior. He's not sure how he will be received, yet as he starts walking up the driveway, his father sees him coming and runs to him with great joy. The young man can't even apologize before his father forgives him and welcomes him home in love. Says the happy father: *We have to be glad and celebrate...this one who was dead is alive; this one who was lost has been found!* (Luke 15:11ff).



Says the little girl to her mother, *Mama, would you love me...if I turned into a polar bear, and I was the meanest bear you ever saw and I had sharp, shiny teeth, and I chased you into your tent and you cried?*

Says her mother, *Then I would be very surprised and very scared. But still, inside the bear, you would be you, and I would love you.*

The soldiers led Jesus up the hill to be crucified. When they came to the place called *The Skull*, they nailed Jesus to the cross. As they lifted him up, Jesus prayed, *Father, forgive them for they don't know what they're doing.* (Luke 23:34).

Says the mother to her little girl, *I will love you, forever and for always, because you are my Dear One.*

Says the Lord to each of us, (John 15:12-14, 16-17)

¹²*"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command you... ¹⁶You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. ¹⁷I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.*

Amen.