Easter 2011
"The love that changed the world"

On the day that Jesus rose from the dead the disciples who knew about it were running around telling the disciples who didn't know yet. John finds Peter and excitedly says, "Peter, Peter, I've got some good news and I've got some bad news." Peter takes hold of John and tries to calm him down saying, "Take it easy John, what is it? What's the good news?" John says, "It's Jesus. The good news is that Jesus has risen from the dead. He's alive!" "That's incredible" Peter says, "but what's the bad news?" John gets quiet at this point, leans forward, and whispers in Peter's ear "the bad news is that he wants to talk to you about denying him on Friday."

A nice little joke, but you know, that's exactly what happened, the risen Jesus came to Peter, who must've been pretty uncertain about what Jesus was going to say. And it would've been understandable if Jesus looked Peter in the eye and said "Peter, how could you do such a thing after all I've done for you?" or "Peter, you should be ashamed of yourself!" But that's not what happened. Jesus came to Peter, looked him in the eye and said, "Peter do you love me?" No shame, no guilt, straight to the heart of the matter.

Now I need to pause and tell you a little something about how this story was originally written. In English we use one word, love, to cover the full range of meaning from the love of chocolate to the love of a mother. But this story was first written in Greek, which uses different words to convey the various meanings of love. When Jesus said, "Peter, do you love me?" he used the word "agape" which is complete love, selfless love, the love of a parent for a child, the love of God. And when you read the story in English you see that Peter responded by saying "Yes Lord, you know that I love you," but what you would miss is that Peter does <u>not</u> use *agape* but uses a quite different word, "philos" which is the love of a friend.

"Peter, do you *agape* me? Lord, you know I *philos* you!" And that is why Jesus presses him and asks him again "Peter, do you *agape* me?" to which, once again Peter can only rise to the level of a friend, "Lord, you know I *philos* you"

Then in the third exchange Jesus does something quite striking. Jesus changes his word to match Peter. "Peter, do you *philos* me?" to which an exasperated Peter replied "Lord, you know everything, you know that I *philos* you." And in this way Peter was forgiven and restored.

It is worth knowing that for reasons that aren't entirely clear, Peter could only go so far with his love, and that Jesus met him where he was. It is also worth knowing that Jesus instructed Peter to do something with that love: "Peter, feed my sheep."

Jesus' *agape* love for Peter was so deep that he came down a level to meet Peter however far he could come, and then he told Peter to do the same with others.

This is the love that changed the world.

And we are not so different from Peter, for us there is also good news and well, not bad news, but more complex news. The good news is that Christ is risen which means that death does not have the final say on anyone. God is in the business of giving life and giving life eternally.

The more complex news is that Christ wants to have a conversation with us about how we use this great gift. Jesus similarly looks us in the eye and says, “Kevin, do you love me…Feed my sheep.”

As was true with Peter, Jesus will come to meet us where we are but God never leaves us where we begin. The goal is always to move us from *philos* to *agape*, first with God then to express our love for God by finding love for his children, especially the poor.

Because this love that changed the world is still changing the world, every time you or I walk out of this place with a renewed commitment to care for all God’s children. Christ is risen and yes, we love you Jesus.

Amen.