

Qualified to Serve  
John 21:15-22

In today's society, in order to get a job you have to first endure a rigorous interview and demonstrate that you have what it takes to do the job. Employers looking to hire personnel for their company study the applicants very carefully. From the very first interview they measure your abilities, they assess your intelligence for and experience in their line of work, and they scrutinize resumes, pour over recommendations, and even give tests. Because so much depends on meeting someone else's expectations, you constantly wonder if you have what it takes to get the job. You have to prove that you are more qualified than the next guy.

On Easter Sunday we received 7 persons into the church, 2 of them professing their faith by receiving baptism. What a wonderful day in the life of our church! The vows and promises they made that day should remind us of the vows and promises we made when we became members. In case you don't remember, you vowed to uphold this church with your prayers, your presence, your gifts, your service, and your witness. These vows are not to be taken lightly. They are drawn from the commission that Jesus gave all who would be his disciples shortly before he ascended into heaven to assume his position of authority. Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Mt.28:19-20).

These are pretty tall expectations that we have promised to do. I don't know about you, but, frankly, I sometimes find it hard to live up to what I believe is expected of me. Think about it, honestly. How are you doing with the promise to uphold your church with prayer, presence, gifts, service, and witness? What are you doing to surround the children of our church with love, prayer, and forgiveness so they will want to accept Jesus as their Savior? How well are we

seeking to know God, grow in faith and share God's love in such a way that we make disciples of Jesus? Do you ever look at these tall expectations and wonder if you are even qualified?

And if society's standards aren't hard enough, God expects us, as individuals and the church, to be the visible representation of Jesus to the world. In fact, Jesus tells us, "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father" (Jn.14:12). "Do even greater things than Jesus? There is no way I can live up to those kinds of expectations," we would say with good reason. Jesus was perfect and holy; we're not – we sin. Jesus never let his Father down; we let Jesus down time and time again. Really, how can we keep our promises?

That's the question Jesus wanted to answer for Peter. **(Read text here.)**

Peter was one of Jesus' inner circle disciples. Along with James and John, Peter was given special instruction, was able to witness some of Jesus private miracles, and was with him on the mount when Jesus spoke with Moses and Elijah and heard the Father say, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him." Peter was the one who proclaimed Jesus to be the Messiah. But when it came to choices, when Peter could have made a stand for Jesus, Peter denied he even knew Jesus, not once but three times.

But despite Peter's failings, Jesus had forgiven Peter and, with the rest of the disciples, had commissioned them for the work they were to do, a work that would mean life or death for those to whom they would share the message of love and forgiveness that is now available through Jesus death and resurrection. Peter knows what to do; he's just not confident that he's qualified to do it. He'd messed up too many times, how could Jesus count on him?

Ever feel like that? Then the questions Jesus asks of Peter are for you as well.

"Simon, (his given name – Peter, meaning Rock, Jesus gave him) do you love me more than these?" In Greek there are three, perhaps more, words that are translated "love" in English:

agape, phileo, and eros. Jesus uses “agape” here, in essence asking, “Peter, are you willing to give up everything for me, even your very life? Do you love me more than anything else?” This is the commitment that is expected of all of us.

Peter considered his love commitment and knew he could not answer yes. “You know I love (phileo) you; I love you as a brother.” Like Peter, we look at our lives and have to admit that we may think that we are willing to give our all, but, in fact, we really love our own life and far too often compromise the promises we make. “Lord, I really want to love you more than anything else and love others the way you do, unconditionally. But I don’t. I love you as a brother, but I’m not qualified to represent you, let alone serve in your place.”

Jesus responds by accepting Peter and accepting us where we are, with the love that we have and are willing to give. “Feed my lambs. I have little ones that need a brother or sister’s love.”

Again Jesus asks, “Do you agape me? Do you love me more than anything else?” and again with Peter we say, “Lord, I am not able to agape you. I am not qualified to serve in your place.” Jesus responds (literally), “Shepherd my little sheep.”

We wonder how. We have not loved Jesus more than anything else; in fact, we are often prejudiced, self-centered, arrogant, and proud. How can we lead others to Jesus? Even as we are pondering how, Jesus asks again, only this time the question is different. “Do you phileo me? Do you love me as a brother? Will you be committed to me?”

“Lord,” with Peter we respond, “you know all things. You know that I love you as a brother. It’s all that I can do. I’m just not the one to represent you. I’m not qualified.”

Jesus’ reply is startling, “Feed my sheep. Take care of the flock.”

Have you noticed that each of Jesus questions is about Peter’s present love of Jesus but that Peter answers based on past performance and then Jesus replies with a command for the

future? Jesus did not ask Peter to dwell on the failures of his past but on his decision for the present. What is past has been redeemed already. When we repent and turn back to God, God forgives us. We are no longer enslaved to what was; **so let it go!** We must not allow others or ourselves to convince us that we are. "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed!" Jesus is able and willing to take our love, even though we don't think it is good enough, and use it to bless the world, use it to make a difference in the lives of others, and use it to help others come to salvation in Jesus Christ. The decision is not about what we have to offer but about being faithful in the offering.

Clarence Johnson was a Christian and pioneer in race relations in the Deep South. In 1942, he was reading his Bible and believed he was being called to action. With a PhD in New Testament Greek as well as a degree in agriculture, he developed Koinonia Farm, a pioneering cooperative venture where blacks and whites farmed, lived, and worshipped together, in Americus, GA. The price was constant harassment and sporadic violence. One night, the nearly ripened crops were burnt to the ground. A reporter, who actually participated in the KKK raid the night before, sought Johnson for an interview. Mocking Johnson's education and apparent failure, he asked why Johnson was out working that day. Johnson looked up from his hoeing and responded, "We Christians aren't called to be successful. We're called to be faithful." I would add that when we remain faithful, God will give success.

Jesus isn't calling those who think they are qualified; if he did there would be no church. Rather, Jesus qualifies the called. Jesus is looking for our willingness and our faithfulness. "Do you love me? Feed the lambs, shepherd the little once, take care of the flock." Jesus will take us as we are. "Come, follow me."