

**SERMON PREACHED AT ST ANDREW'S WALKERVILLE BY THE REV'D STUART
LANGSHAW, SUNDAY MAY 1 2022. BASED ON JOHN 21:15-17**

Have you ever noticed the main window here at St Andrew's – the window in the wall behind the Communion Table? Have you ever looked at the background surrounding the figure of the ascending Jesus ... the colours and the features of the background. The background's job is to make the main figure stand out more clearly, more noticeably.

I want to start today by looking at the background of a word in the reading we had this morning from the gospel of John where Jesus asked Peter if Peter loved him. The word is "love."

Here's the background – and like all backgrounds it's a bit uninteresting. In Greek philosophy, there were 7 kinds of love.

There was romantic, passionate love – that was **Eros**.

Then there was affectionate, friendly, best-friends love – that was **Philia**.

Thirdly was unconditional, family love such as a child feels for its parent – that's **Storgé**. Four to go! There was playful, flirtatious love – and that was **Ludus**.

There was committed, long-lasting love such as in a 65-year marriage relationship- that was **Pragma**.

In the sixth place there was self-love, and that was **Philautia**.

Lastly, seventhly, there was selfless, unconditional love and that was **Agapé**.

Eros ... Philia ...Storgé ... Ludus ... Pragma ... Philautia ... Agapé. These 7 kinds and degrees of emotion are all translated into English as the one word "love."

And of these 7 words in Greek philosophy, there are only three in the New Testament. They are Storgé (family love) ... Philia (best-friends, brotherly love) ... and Agapé (selfless, unconditional love). In the New Testament all three of them are translated into English as "love."

In the gospel of John chapter 11 and verse 3, we read about Lazarus, and Mary and Martha . The two women sent Jesus the message, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." The word they used is Philia – Jesus regarded Lazarus as a really, really good friend – almost a "bestie." In the gospel of John chapter 20:2, the disciple John is described as the disciple whom Jesus loved. The word used is Philia – John was a disciple whom Jesus regarded as a really, really good friend – again, almost a "bestie." Philia. In the Old Testament, the friendship that young David and Jonathan (King Saul's son) had together is translated as Philia – really, really good friends – they were "besties."

And that's the end of the background. And thank heavens for that!!

Our question is, why, when Jesus repeated his question to Peter – "Do you love me?" that Peter got so upset?

So we start looking at the main figures in our gospel reading that are made to stand out clearly and noticeably against this background. Those main figures are Jesus and Peter. In the gospel reading seven of Jesus' disciples are on the beach eating a baked-fish breakfast over fire, and eating with Jesus. As they finished eating and talking about fishing ... with Thomas and the other 5 disciples listening, Jesus said to Peter, "Peter, do you love me more than these?" **The word Jesus used is Agapé** – "Peter, ... do you love me selflessly, unconditionally, completely?" The unspoken words were, "Peter you denied that you knew me ..., now do you agapé me?" What sort of a breakfast question is that? You can imagine Peter, flustered and caught off guard. But he replied, "Yes Lord, you know that I love you." **The word Peter used is Philia** - Lord, you know that you and I are really very good friends. We have a really strong bond ." But you see, that's not what Jesus had asked. He had asked, "Do you Agapé me?" Peter replied that he "philiad" Jesus.

But Jesus went on – “Peter, do you love me?” **The word Jesus used again is Agapé** – “Peter, do you love me selflessly, unconditionally, completely?” The unspoken words were, “Peter, twice you denied that you were any associate of mine. For a second time, ‘Do you agape me?’” And Peter, still firmly in Jesus sights, said, “Yes Lord, you know that I love you.” **The word Peter used is again Philia** – “Yes Lord, you know that you and I are really very good friends.”

I wonder if Jesus paused. I wonder if Peter’s eyes dropped as Jesus said, “Peter, For a third time ... do you love me?” The unspoken words were, “Peter, three times you denied that you were any associate of mine, that you even knew me. So for a third time, ‘Do you love me?’” **The word Jesus used is ... Philia** – “Peter, are we good friends, are we brothers?” Not Agapé but Philia ... Peter’s word. Is it any wonder that Peter was upset that Jesus had asked the third question in this way ... not because Jesus was repeating himself, but because Jesus had down-scaled the intensity of the question ... downscaled the intensity of Peter’s love for him. Philia, not Agapé.

And with what sort of emotion, with what sort of passion, did Peter reply, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” **And the word Peter used is ... Philia** – Lord, you and I are really very good friends.” You see, that’s what Jesus had asked. He had asked, “Do you philia/love me?” Peter replied that he “philiad” Jesus. Philia, not Agapé.

That background we did at the start helps us to get some sort of idea of the tension, the emotion, the passion that Peter must have been feeling.

And Jesus gave Peter a job to do – to feed Jesus’ sheep and lambs. To put that love into practice ... to show care and help and grace to those who also love Jesus.

It’s wonderful to think that, when Peter wrote his first epistle, he said in it, “Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply from the heart” **And the word Peter used is Agapé**. How he had come on since his conversation on the beach with Jesus over a barbecue breakfast.

But that same question from Jesus to Peter comes to us today in various ways. Do you love me? When we are put in a situation that we know is questionable, is “iffy,” Jesus’ question comes to us – **Do you love me ... agapé me ...** and in this situation will you put into practice your Christian discipleship and Christian love. Jesus gives us a job to do. When we are confronted by a situation where our help is needed, but our natural inclination is not to get involved, Jesus’ question comes to us – **Do you love me ... agapé me ...** and will you be true to your Christian compassion and to Christian grace and get involved. Jesus gives us a job to do. When we see a person standing at Morning Tea by themselves and our wish is to enjoy the company of our friends, Jesus’ question comes to us – **Do you love me ... agapé me ...** and will you be true to your Christian hospitality and generosity of heart and speak to that isolated person. We are given a job to do. When someone does something that is not quite the way we would do it, or not quite the way it is done at St Andrew’s, Jesus’ question comes to us – **Do you love me ... agapé me ...** and will you with grace and big-heartedness accept that person’s way of doing it without comment and without criticism. That is the job Jesus gives us to do.

It's interesting to note that Jesus expressed no disappointment at Peter’s answer where the disciple used the word Philia. Philia is very good love, but Agapé love is deeper, stronger than Philia love.

Philia-love is very important in our Christian fellowship - affectionate, friendly love, best-friends love. It makes the wheels of our fellowship and deeds of service go around and around very well. We have that sort of love here at St Andrew’s in spades. But Agapé-love ... selfless, unconditional love ... is the deepest love of all. That’s the love that God has for us – so selfless that it sent Jesus to the cross for us – God so loved (Agapé) the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16) God so Agapé) the world.

And at the end of his epistle John wrote, "Friends, if God so loved (Agapéd) us, we ought to love (Agapé) one another.

The question came to Peter – "Peter do you Agapé-love me?"

And the question comes to us – "Do you Agapé-love me?" What is our reply?

i