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News of Doris Day's death this past week, came as a shock, as many thought, with no news about her, she had already died.

Besides her songs and films, she is remembered for her sayings like, *"Wrinkles are hereditary. Parents get them from their children"*, and *"If it's true that men are such beasts, this must account for the fact that most women are animal lovers."* I would have thought these comments are those made by Joan Rivers, but not; they are Doris Day's.

On a more sober note, she said, *"Gratitude is riches. Complaint is poverty"*, a timely message to our politicians who complain on behalf of the people, to be seen as their champions!

She also said: *"I like joy; I want to be joyous; I want to have fun on the set; I want to wear beautiful clothes and look pretty. I want to smile and I want to make people laugh. And that's all I want. I like it. I like being happy. I want to make others happy"*. What's the ONE word repeated through this passage? Yes! it's "I", echoing the trinity of the self: I, me and myself, which has shaped more than a generation!

How different from what we learned last Sunday: in Hebrew, the root of the word **Love**, is **to give**!

We have just completed a three-part series on **"This is Love"** - exploring first, God's love that forgives our sin, and restores our hearts and minds to a new relationship with Him, through Christ; we then explored God's love that conquered death to assure us, our hope of a glorious future with Him, beyond the aches and pains of this life, is not in vain; and finally God's love is not like fixing a bashed up car at the best body shop, *"so no one will know it had an accident"*, but a love so special, God is committed to

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making **ALL** things new; the past is passed, and the present determines our future.

Does God's love have any practical value? What does it mean to be governed by God's love? Will it change me? How will I cope with the change? What will people say when they see me changed? Will they make fun of me ("*you've gone all religious!*"), or will they admire me and want to know more....?

Over the next three weeks, there are three passages I want us to consider, which help us better understand the practical impact of God's love in our lives. The first is an important conversation Jesus has with Peter on the shores of Lake Galilee; the second is Nicodemus' midnight encounter with Jesus; and the third is the well known parable of the "Prodigal Son", a title which I think, fails to convey Jesus' real message.

Our first passage is about Peter, the boisterous/energetic/full-of-energy/often-bumbling fisherman, is a character worth studying. He is so much like so many of us!

- **Sometimes, Peter says the right words:** Jesus and the Disciples are chilling out together when He asked them, *Who do people say I am?* They replied, *some say, John the Baptist, others say Elijah, ... Jeremiah or one of the other prophets.*

*And who do **YOU** say I am?* Jesus persisted, to which Peter blurted out,

You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!

Jesus affirms Peter that this knowledge could only have been revealed by God, and confirms that Peter is the "rock" on whom He will build His Church, which we saw happen at Pentecost

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- **Yet sometimes, Peter makes the wrong call!** A week later, Jesus takes Peter, James and John to witness the glory that was His in Heaven (the Transfiguration). They saw and heard Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah, “*about His departure which He was about to bring to fulfilment at Jerusalem*”¹. Both came to tell Jesus, they were missing Him in Heaven; the Father was pining for Him, waiting for Him to complete His mission on earth and return.

Peter offered to build a tabernacle for each of them (*a temporary tent made of nature's materials*); not only did Peter fail to understand the significance of what was happening, but he he failed on two levels: *first*, he placed his Master, the one whom he identified as, ***the Christ, the Son of the Living God!***, at the same level as two men of great faith and action, Moses and Elijah. Peter's *second* mistake was to offer them temporary shelter. He could not appreciate, that Jesus took him, John and James to give them a glimpse of Heaven, who “were missing Him back home”, but Peter wanted to hold onto the timeless moment, in time-bound earth! **Sometimes, Peter made the wrong call!**

- **There were times when Peter promised the world!** All four Gospel authors narrate the details of what happened and what was said during their last Passover meal together. Matthew's report is very brief; Mark provides some detail, and John notes in great detail, Jesus' replies to each Disciple's questions; but Luke, whose Gospel account is well researched, provides interesting details. **ALL** four Gospel accounts refer to a specific dialogue between Jesus and Peter!
As they were finishing the meal, “a dispute broke out among the disciples about who was the greatest among them.”²

¹ Luke 9:30-31

² Luke 22:24

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Having quelled the argument, Jesus turns to Peter, *"Simon! Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers"*³

Peter replies, ***Lord! I am ready to go to prison and to death for You!***, to which Jesus predicts, *Before the crows **today**, Peter (you think you are as strong as a rock, eh?!), you will deny me three times.*

We know what happened: lurking in the shadow of the Temple pillars moments before sunrise, Peter angrily denies ever knowing Jesus!

What ever happened to: *I will go to prison, even die for you, my Lord! ?*

- **As Jesus predicted, the cock crowed; Peter remembered Jesus' words, and broke down, sobbing. Peter knew he had failed his Lord and Master; he felt a broken man.** Returning to Galilee, Simon Peter sits by the shore reflecting on the past three years. Just before sunrise he declares, *I am going back to fishing!* They set off into the Sea of Galilee, catch nothing and return to find Jesus on the shore, inviting them to a cooked breakfast!

There is one person Jesus needs to speak with and it is a very important conversation. Pointing to the miraculous catch of fish a short while before, Jesus asks, *Simon son of John, do you really love me more than these?*

Jesus repeated the question twice and each time Peter replied, *You know that I love You.*

The third time Jesus asked the question, Peter felt very hurt; questions would have been swirling through his mind: *How many times must I repeat myself? Have I not said it enough times? What will it take to be forgiven my sin of denial? - **Lord! You know all things! You know what is***

³ Luke 22:31-32

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in my heart! You know my deepest thoughts, my intentions and my motivation! What do you want me say? You KNOW that I love You!

Jesus was not trying to establish a ritual of “repeat three times...”; He was not trying to dress Peter down publicly (*after all he publicly denied ever knowing Jesus - a tit-for-tat response*). At the third repeat of the same question, Peter breaks down in tears, pleading with Jesus, ***Lord! You know all things! You know that I love you!*** Jesus brings Peter to the point where he needs to be emotionally restored; having failed, Peter needs emotional healing and that’s what he admits to.

This is our journey! Pointing to the things which consume our time and attention, Jesus asks us the question, ***Do you love me more than these? Do you REALLY love me more than these?***

Jesus is not trying to wear us down, nor exhaust us, not even undermine us. He wants **us** to stop at a point in our lives, and acknowledge, *It's not what I want to do for you Lord! My life is about what You want to do in me; and when you have done that work in me, work through me!*

Of what practical value is God’s love in my life? As practical as it was in Peter’s life - ***If you love me more than all these things you are involved in, then feed those who are struggling with their faith (lambs), and encourage and build up those who are struggling with the pressures of life (sheep).***

AMEN.