

**May 4-5, 2019; John 21:9-19; Feed My Sheep
Fresh Expressions; Holy Communion**

Last week was a relief to my soul! I spent a few days at the Sacred Heart Benedictine Monastery in Yankton, S.D. as part of my studies in Spiritual Direction. I've learned more about my inner self and learned about ways to help people recognize what God is up to in their lives so that their relationship with the Divine might be strengthened.

Besides the classes, there was time to unwind, write poetry, and catch up with my other classmates.

After the 7 am morning prayers, there was free time to walk a couple of miles before class began. Getting fresh air helps me re-frame my life. It's great to walk the paths at the cemetery and then go across the highway to Westside Park and greet the ducks and geese.

My mind began to wonder, do they stay all year round or if they migrate to warmer climates before winter sets in? What has their journey been like? If they flew over sea, was it glorious or did they fear fatigue, dropping into the ocean, and not making it to safety?

Have storms come upon them without warning and assaulted them with winds and rain?

We know one thing for certain. They have endured and survived the epic journey of life.

Simon Peter and his fishing buddies are survivors, too.

Not long ago Simon Peter had walked away from Jesus and lied about being one of his friends when Jesus needed him most. Not once, not twice, but three times right before his death on the cross.

Sometime later they were at the Sea of Tiberias, the time they caught a boatload of fish. After the fishing experience, Jesus and the disciples gathered around the smoky campfire with Jesus. They have a simple, wholesome breakfast.

When they finish eating, Jesus turns and says to Peter and asks, "*Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?*" Peter says to him, "*Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.*" And Jesus says to him, "*Feed my lambs.*" Without missing a beat, Jesus asks again if Peter loves him, and after Peter says that he does love him, Jesus says, "*Tend my sheep.*" Then again, as though the question had not been asked, Jesus inquires about Peter's love. Peter is hurt by this persistent questioning. Three times he insists that he is a disciple of Jesus and loves his lord. Finally he blurts out, "*Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.*" Jesus commands him, once again, "*Feed my sheep.*" (vv. 15-17).

Feed my young lambs, give them what they need in order to grow-up knowing that they are loved just the way they are.

Shepherd or Tend my sheep. Gather the adults in their young and middle years. Share your wisdom and help keep them on track and never stop reminding them of my love for them.

Feed my Sheep, the older ones that need more help than they once did. Take care of their spirits and don't hold back.

Once Peter proclaimed his love and devotion to the risen Christ, he felt forgiven and knew that the slate was wiped clean. He was blessed in a way that enabled him to move on.

And beyond that, Jesus is laying out a want ad or job description for those that want to be good disciples. Those who will be involved in the day-to-day work of caring for the people of God.

There are especially good times that we feel motivated to get going in doing God's work. We may feel all rev'd up when on a spiritual high after going on retreat, or to summer camp or on a mission trip, or after glorious Easter Sunday worship.

But where do we go from there?

Jesus tells us that if you love Jesus it's time to roll up your sleeves and get to work tending and feeding the flock of God.

The ducks and geese know exactly where to go based on annual migration patterns. They make their way based upon air currents And Weather Team Now extended forecasts. ☺They move in the direction that the current takes them, that's what birds do!

We need time taking care of our own spirits so that we can be renewed and discern what the will of God is-and we are prepared to do (as Paul says in Romans) *what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

We often hear people refer to the will of God. Jesus tells us plain and clear that God's will includes this: we who love Jesus must feed the lambs, shepherd the sheep and feed the sheep.

The repetition Jesus invokes helps us remember that the work is ongoing. What are we doing that feeds and shepherds the flock?

Being hospitable and courteous is an important beginning,

But we know that we are asked to do even more.

St. Paul Benson has heard in Jesus' voice that Christian community makes demands on its members, and expects a high level of commitment including regular worship attendance and discussion of theology and scripture. These are essentials in the life of faithful.

And we hear Jesus say that he has high expectations for his disciples.

No one said that being a follower of Jesus is easy, but it is what makes life rewarding. It is our identity as a child of God.

Last week Kaitlyn Wazsak reported about going to Puerto Rico. She's one of the excellent examples of what young people coming out of this church do with their lives. They've been taught to reach out in mission and not put limits on going beyond the walls of our Christian community. We know that feeding the vulnerable lambs that Jesus has entrusted to our care means putting time, energy and money to take care of the world around us.

Last week we began our worship series centered on Fresh Expressions. We pray for the movement of the Holy Spirit to inspire us with ways to engage with the Benson neighborhood.

We are just beginning this. God only knows where it will take us! Each week we are fed with Word and Spirit through song, prayer, Word, and fellowship. Today we will be fed at the Table of Holy Communion, nourished for the ministry God has called us to do.

For a couple of months the Fresh Expressions Team has been meeting and discussing way to reach out.

The first light bulb idea was to connect with parents of children that are enrolled at the St. Paul Child Dev. Center. There are endless possibilities of how we might do this. At the end of the month, the team has a plan. For a minimal charge to cover the costs of the ingredients, the parents and team members will work side by side to prepare and assemble a meal that can be brought home and enjoyed as a family.

Feed my lambs, Jesus says. Feed my sheep.

Members of the Health Team brought went to the Benson Public Library last week and had set up a session so that people

could go home with Advanced Directives.

Personally, I'm relieved to finally get this done so I don't have to worry that my family will be tempted to do more life saving measures than I'd want. Soon we will put together another class that will benefit people. Once again we volunteers will provide delicious homemade cookies, tasty sandwiches, and good hospitality.

We will connect with new people in loving ways and build relationships.

Tend my sheep, Jesus says.

I look around and wonder what your responses will be to the imperative of Jesus.

In this flock is a lot of experience in weathering storms of life.

Professionals, how do you use your expertise to help disintegrated families, illiteracy, alcoholism, and hunger?

It is important for us to be an outward-looking congregation that engages the world with a servant mentality.

Nurses, teachers, psychologists, administrators, respiratory therapists, tax preparers, and all others.

How is God calling you to respond to his question:

How will you tend to God's beloved children?

Cuddlers of babies and huggers of elderly, Sunday School teachers, bakers, visitors of sick, and listeners of lonely and those in prison.

Poets, painters, and singers, whatever the gifts you've been given, how is God calling you to feed and tend the vulnerable sheep?

Pray, discuss the ideas, and share the path with another on this journey.

I invite you to close your eyes, take a deep breath, and enter into the presence of the Risen Christ.

Jesus looks into your eyes, a beloved disciple,
and gently addresses you by name.

Dear one, do you love me? Then feed my lambs.

Cherished one, do you love me? Then shepherd my sheep.

Treasured one, do you love me? Then feed my sheep.

So be it.

At the end of these verses, John says, "there are so many other things Jesus did. I can't imagine a world big enough to hold such a library of books!" May we trust enough and move with the Holy Spirit into the current of God's love. May we be true to the call of discipleship and affirm our love for Jesus the Christ.