

## **Feed My Sheep**

John 21: 1-19

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Biblical scholars are unanimous in their opinion that chapter 21 of the gospel of John was not part of the original gospel but a later add-on. Original or not, it certainly makes for a moving epilogue to a dramatic and symbolic Gospel. It takes care of a lot of questions one might have at the end of chapter 20, especially the question of “Now what?”. Chapter 21 not only sheds light on key elements of the fate of this early Christian community but also sheds light on key elements of our life as disciples today.

It seems that after all that turmoil, the trauma of losing their leader to death, and the experiences of seeing him again after he had died, the disciples decided to go back to the task they knew: fishing.

Their first fishing trip was unsuccessful until Jesus calls out to them to throw the net on the other side of the boat. And as they recognize Jesus, they pull in the net full of fish – 153 to be exact (makes you wonder – who is counting? And why?) Once the disciples return to the beach, Jesus is cooking fish on the beach.

There are lots of fish in this story. And not metaphorical fish, either. Fresh, nourishing fish. Char-grilled fish. And bread, waiting to be eaten. A meal to nourish and strengthen the disciples who have spent a whole night out working hard.

John’s gospel ends with a nice breakfast on the beach, and Jesus’ questions for Peter: Do you love me? Feed my sheep. Do you love me? Feed my lambs. Do you love me? Feed my sheep.

Three times Jesus asks Peter, “Do you love me?” Three times is a lot. It is kind of hurtful when someone has to ask three times. But then, Peter denied knowing Jesus three times at a time when it really mattered.

I think it is Jesus’ way of drawing Peter back into community of his followers and forgiving him, restoring him as a disciple, and not just drawing him back in but putting him in charge of answering the question of “what’s next?”

Feed my sheep is the answer. There is work to be done, Jesus says, and you, we are it. The followers of Jesus are asked to do one thing, and one thing only: to care for his sheep.

We need to realize that Jesus speaks in metaphors here that are understood by his listeners. He entrusts Peter with the care of the flock, handing over the duties that a shepherd has: pasturing – providing nourishment (food), protecting, searching out the strays, caring for injuries, and providing shelter.

This is what the church has done ever since its beginning: caring for her own, and caring for people beyond her walls. Early Christian communities fed the hungry, cared for the homeless and the sick. In the process they told the story of Jesus and, with that, brought in new people, baptizing them, and asking them to carry on the work that Jesus handed to Peter on that beach.

Today, we might be tempted to stick with the metaphorical, or spiritual meaning of this passage. Share some good spiritual food. Have a Bible Study. Run a VBS. Listen to a riveting sermon. Discuss theology. These things are great and good and part of the Christian life and faith development. They are necessary to feed one’s own soul. But as followers of Christ, we are also, if not more strongly, called to action. Faith without action is self-serving, or as we read in James 2: 17 “... faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”

Feed my sheep, Jesus says to us. Care for people, feed them, and in light of that, care for all of creation. This last statement might seem to stretch Jesus' words a bit but I think all of that is related, looking at our world today and where we are heading.

This past Friday, the world celebrated its 46<sup>th</sup> Earth Day – a day, if nothing else, that is a reminder to us that we are the stewards of this planet that feeds and nourishes us.

Feeding people, feeding ourselves has become complicated. Maybe it was a simpler task in years past, but it does not seem to be simple anymore. If you want truly nourishing food, you must:

- Only shop the outsides of the grocery store, and stay away from the aisles which contain the foods with little or no nutritional value.
- Know how to read labels, or totally stay away from anything packaged.
- If you want to avoid pesticides, you must go organic.
- If you want to stay away from GMOs, forget eating any product with corn or soy.
- Your breakfast cereal is mostly sugar and no protein.
- Vegetable oils, once hailed as the healthy alternative to butter, has sent heart disease rocketing.
- Despite everything low-fat, fat-free, sugar-free, it is ironic and tragic that diabetes and obesity have risen to astronomical levels, especially in children.

If you want truly nourishing food, you must go back to eating real food, whole food, fresh food; food that does not have ingredients; food that is the ingredient. Did I say it's gotten complicated? It has.

Now I know that talking about Earth Day can come off as a political bludgeon that alienates more than it persuades, or it can seem like ticking off a box that says, "look, we are doing the green thing" in church, and then we go back to life as usual.

Actually, from a faith perspective, remembering Earth Day, or any effort of becoming a "greener" church, or **how** we feed people – be it at our luncheons, or Community dinners, or food drives for the food pantry, the food that we share in community or when we cook for the families of Family

Promise Network – is something much larger than a political statement or a good pat on our own back.

It is really part of the Resurrection experience, beginning to see that **how** we relate to all of Creation is central to living into our Easter message. This is what Jesus is getting at over breakfast:

Feed my sheep.

Go forth and feed the world, Jesus tells Peter: Feed those who are hungry, give them shelter. Go to places scared by hurricane, earthquake, disease, neglect, pollution, warfare, corruption, poverty, ignorance.

Make our world whole, bring new life, become the hands and feet of grace wherever you go. Make Easter alive in the dead places.

To fully walk in faith is about putting feet to our prayers and the longings of our heart. That kind of faith can pull us outside ourselves and connect us to each other and to all of creation in ways we have not dreamed.

And yes, many things get in our way. Much political rhetoric is now being spent on the issue of global warming and climate change. Some extraordinary work has gone into researching this crisis, but still, in 2016, not everyone is convinced that it is really happening. The problem, I would submit, is that the language of politics has eclipsed not only the language of science, but the language of faith.

I grant you that fixing all that is broken seems an overwhelming task. But nevertheless, it has to start somewhere, and that somewhere is and can be with you and me.

We can start with a few simple, no-brainer things: turning off lights, recycling cans, bottles, paper, cardboard. We can use fewer resources by not buying more than we need, driving fewer miles, and eating organic food grown closer to where we live.

But even if we do all that and more, it will not be enough. Inevitably, we will end up in the realm of public policy because the solutions are larger and more complicated than anything any of us can do as individuals, or even as a single nation.

It is a matter of working together, of setting our differences aside globally, and support smart policies that are good for the earth.

I think, I believe that this can happen, and that we, people of faith, have an important role to play in that dialogue.

I would love for all of us to experience Kripalu – A place for yoga and health. Remember that you gave me a gift certificate for my 50<sup>th</sup> for a weekend for two to the Center for Yoga and Health? Well, I left the spouse at home and turned it into 5 days for one. There are many reasons why I love this place: the location (across from Tanglewood) is gorgeous. The food is delicious. The activities and programs are geared toward health and wholeness.

If you ever want to experience green living on a bigger scale, Kripalu is the place. The rooms are simple. All the soaps are organic. Everything gets recycled. Most of the food (as it is possible) is organically sourced and comes from close by farms. All the food scraps are composted. Left-over food is donated to shelters and food ministries. There are no TVs anywhere. Wifi access is limited to certain spots in the building. The building is heated with biofuel. Most strikingly, as soon as you leave the main lobby, the building is quiet.

Even though Kripalu started as an Ashram community, it is a very spiritual place where everyone is welcome and it is a place that values health and well-being for everyone.

Living into the Resurrection experience by caring for all of creation takes hard work, creativity and courage. In our walk of faith, Jesus invites us to be part of his loving, graceful, redeeming work in this

world. He is inviting us to a walk of faith that brings healing and wholeness to that which is broken, not just in our souls, but everywhere and everyone on this planet. Amen.