



ALL ABOUT THE SHEPHERD (Sermon)

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Scripture: John 21:15-19

¹⁵ When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “**Feed my lambs.**”

¹⁶ Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “**Take care of my sheep.**”

¹⁷ The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “**Feed my sheep.**”

¹⁸ Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.”

¹⁹ Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “**Follow me!**”

Not everyone can be a good, gentle, shepherd. It isn't just the staff, or the rod, that makes a shepherd. Shepherding isn't just leading by the still waters. There's more to shepherding than what you can learn from a song.

We look at shepherding from a western, often urban, construct. Perhaps, because most of what we're taught about Christianity has come from that perspective. But the shepherding Jesus talks about in our Scripture reading is different. It is one familiar to most from an Eastern culture of shepherding. Ellen White says:

“In the East the shepherd's care for his flock is untiring and incessant....As the shepherd leads his flock over the rocky hills, through forest and wild ravines, to grassy nooks by the riverside; as he watches them on the mountains through the lonely night, shielding from robbers, caring tenderly for the sickly and feeble, his life comes to be one with theirs. A strong and tender attachment unites him to the objects of his care. However large the flock, the shepherd knows every sheep. Every one has its name, and responds to the name at the shepherd's call” (*The Desire of Ages*, 478-479).

*What is our care and relationship to our sheep?
How much is our involvement?
How dear is our commitment?*

A shepherd looks at his flock as his current and future investment. The flock needs to be cared for, nurtured, and multiplied in a way that promises a strong future. It needs to be nurtured, protected, and intentionally cared for thus ensuring a strong future for the family and the clan.

In our Scripture for our meditation, we read the risen Jesus addressing His disciples. The first time He called them, about three years earlier, He invited them to be fishers of men. Now He adds to the job description: Be my under-shepherds. Jesus is the chief shepherd; we are His under-shepherds called to nurture the lambs who have scattered post resurrection and bring them back to the fold. A call that still echoes through history's tumultuous highways and byways, knocking now on the doors of our church.

Jesus asks Peter to feed His lambs.

The call of Jesus is not to Peter alone. It is a call to all of us who have taken the name of Jesus, to us who have been called to be His disciples. The call is to feed those who are looking for truth.

Lambs are a skittish bunch. Any kind of fear will scatter them far and wide. They are also inquisitive. They will follow where they think they can eat. They may often wander away to their detriment. So the Master Shepherd says take care of them. The lamb needs food. So, learn to be a good shepherd.

Not just good, but also gentle. The gentle shepherd protects the lambs from straying while allowing them to graze and explore. It is the loving shepherd who not just secures the 99 but goes out looking for that one sheep who is lost. Again Ellen White:

Every soul is as fully known to Jesus as if he were the only one for whom the Saviour died. The distress of every one touches His heart. The cry for aid reaches His ear. He came to draw all men unto Himself. He bids them, "Follow Me," and His Spirit moves upon their hearts to draw them to come to Him. Many refuse to be drawn. Jesus knows who they are. He also knows who gladly hear His call, and are ready to come under His pastoral care. ... He cares for each one as if there were not another on the face of the earth" (*The Desire of Ages*, 480).

We are called to work with, live with, and care for the sheep that Jesus has placed under our care. To them we are to preach the gospel. Not force it on anyone. We are called to convey, both in word and deed, the love of the everlasting gospel and not fearmonger those who are lost. Love cares. Love seeks. Love embraces. Love expects us to be like the Great Shepherd who gave Himself for His lambs.

Feed the lambs.

Allow *them* to discover the truth that God promises will set them free.

In the same book of John, chapter 8, verses 31 and 32, Jesus tells us that truth—the truth that comes from God’s word—will set the true disciple free. It will not chain them to the ways of their ancestry, or tie them down to the demands of culture; God’s truth will release them to grow in God’s word and with respect to those around them; His truth will break down the walls of prejudice; His truth will release the forces of love and allow us to be instruments of peace and justice.

How does all this affect a Christian? To understand fully that question and its impact on Christian life, let us ask ourselves some preliminary questions:

- If we do not respect those around us, do we really know Jesus or His word?
- Is our worship pure, if it demonizes others to make ourselves look good?
- Are we examples of Jesus’ love and grace, if we need to make others look bad?

The rabbis, who often illustrated truth by storytelling, tell the story of how when Sodom and Gomorrah were burning, the angels were rejoicing until they saw the tears on God’s face. God turns to them and asks, “Why are you rejoicing, were they not also my children?”

How then must God feel when His very chosen ones willfully choose to denigrate His other children? If the politics of the world or the social fractures of our society have broken into our churches, and created in us an infection—an attitude of “us” and “them”—how can God’s love be seen? Or how can we speak of one flock under one Shepherd?

God is bigger than politics; indeed, God is not a politician. He is the Sovereign ruler of love; in Him there is no variance, no prejudice. Love is His name; loving is His way. He wants us to grow out of petty politics, prejudice, and any other evilness disguised as remotely godly. To be one with Him is to be rid of all that goes against His character. God is love.

What does all this mean? Jesus put it in two words: Follow Me.

If our church is to grow in the light of Jesus, we are called to be lighthouses of His love and grace to all. So when someone walks into our congregation they know first the love of God and then want to grow to know more about Him so they can mirror His goodness. We must be intentional to not enumerate all the things they do wrong but acknowledge that a child of God has come to know Him more.

Feed the lamb. Let that child of God grow and explore the love and grace of Jesus. Guard them from the enemy and guard them from our own zealous ways. But guide them in the way of the One who said, “Follow Me.” The One who calls is also the One who enables.

The story is told of a young man who was ready to be baptized. His parents wanted him to wait until a certain pastor would come to town; they wanted that pastor to baptize their son. The young man wanted to know why. So, the father told him the story of his birth. The couple were young and while living in a town where they knew no one, the mother went into a complicated labor. It was the pastor’s wife that took care of the mother, fed the family, and helped them to

take care of their baby boy. If it hadn't been for the kindness of that pastor's wife and her husband, the baby wouldn't have survived. The family wouldn't have been blessed as they had been if the pastor's wife and the pastor had not been an example of Jesus in their lives.

When the pastor finally came and conducted the baptism, he didn't remember any of the story. His wife had a vague recollection. But to the family of the young man, their life was changed because a Christian family cared for them not just as a cursory greeting but an actual extension of God's loving care.

Take care of my sheep.

Jesus implores us to look beyond the greetings on a Sabbath or the rote prayers or the sanctimonious formulas that so many use these days.

He asks us to be involved!

Care about the sheep. Not just those in our congregations. In John 10:16, Jesus is intentional in informing his disciples—informing also us in this day and age—that there are sheep in other folds. How we extend our care, without ulterior motives, demonstrates our witness of Jesus' love.

Remember, the story of the ten lepers. Nine of the ten were from the same faith group as Jesus. One was a foreigner, the Samaritan. He recognized the truth of the Messiah while the others were more concerned about the ritual of the temple. Their focus was selfish and human-centric. It was the one who recognized God incarnate that truly knew God. In our daily, sometimes ritualistic, life we see what has been humanly pointed out and often miss God working in our midst.

Our focus must be on Jesus. Our work in ministry must be an extension of Jesus's gospel. There are sheep in other folds. Some may look just like us and others may be so different that our eyes cannot comprehend how God could love them.

But love them He does.

And they will listen to His voice and find their way to His truth and thus be set free from the chains that bind them only...ONLY...if our voices are in tune with the Heavenly Shepherd and we lean not unto our own understanding.

A story is told of a man—back in the day, before digital devices—who wanted to tune his violin. So, he wrote to his local radio station and asked them if they would play a certain note so he could tune his first string. He asked that they play that note for a certain duration at a certain time on a certain day. And they did. Imagine the curiosity that led to discovering more about the man, the instrument, and appreciation of that radio station meeting the need of someone in their community!

We are God's radio station.

The community needs to hear His note so they can tune their lives to the Truth of His word. No other noise. No other commentary. No other distractions. Our calling is to play His note true and clearly so we meet the needs of the community and they in turn can tune their lives to His voice. Call it the Shepherd's voice, if you will; each flock recognizes the voice of their shepherd. That one clear voice that they are attuned to.

God must be first in our lives, and in all things we do, in order for us to be true, and in tune, to His calling.

Feed My Sheep

We often forget Jesus ate while He was on earth. The stories adults tell often leave out the fact that at the wedding in Cana, in the publican's house, at Lazarus' house, with the thousands in the wilderness; Jesus ate, and He fellowshiped. Apparently, He must have loved the sharing of the meal because it's right there in the Bible...the parts we often don't read because we are too busy proving a point. Jesus just fellowshiped without trying to prove anything. His life was His proof. And His company was nurturing.

Even in the broader context of our Scripture reading in John 21, Jesus prepares a meal by the lapping waters of the Sea of Galilee for Peter, Nathanael, James, John, and the other remaining disciples (Judas was not one of the group because this event was post-resurrection).

This same Jesus who washed their feet, broke bread, and passed the wine in the upper room, now cooks breakfast by the sea.

Feeding His disciples was important to our Savior. As it should be to us.

How do we, as a church, feed our congregation and our community? The act of feeding is an extension of our worship. Not just the weekly potlucks, but beyond.

Are we meeting the physical hunger that exists around our community? Is our spiritual meal palatable to those outside the walls of our church?

For food to be eaten, it must taste good. Unless the person is starving. A starving person will eat anything and drink anything and often pay the consequences for that action. But a person seeking to grow well chooses a nutritious meal and will seek it out.

Studies have shown that overly processed and chemically treated food, though convenient, has led to the majority of medical problems today. So, in order to live, people are prescribed medications that have a list of side-effects. And so the cycle of overly processed, convenient, food and drug reliant existence viciously continues.

Jesus calls us to feed His sheep. Feed them the truth that exists in His word, not the overly processed, formulaic, teachings that multiply around us and is convenient for statistical purposes. Though they are familiar, and convenient, and we can just pick the formula that best suits our own image of a god, it is no substitute for the purity of the gospel and the teaching of Jesus. No

one needs to interpret Jesus. Thousands flocked to hear Him speak for no other reason than each understood His words. To the simpleton it was as enlightening as it was to the scholar.

Jesus breaks it all down to the simplest. There is no *one* special prayer, or 15 steps, or whatever. The creator of platypuses, anteaters, and skunks knows that each creation is unique: each creature is special. There is no one food that meets everyone's need.

But there is truth. The truth taught by Jesus reaches beyond human boundaries and appetites, and feeds the soul to freedom.

From feeding lambs to feeding sheep, the nutritional necessity does not diminish, but there is a change in dietary needs and preparation that is required as one matures.

As a lamb grows to *sheep-hood*, so should spiritual teaching and learning methods grow. However, we must always keep Jesus' teachings and instruction as foundational to all we know, teach, and preach.

There must not be an overly processed, produced, and verbose treatment to God's Word. Our prayers must be simple worship. Too often in places of worship today we lend our voices to flowery language, and arguments, and treatises that Jesus called us away from when He gave us *the* outline for all prayers. Should a non-Christian walk into our congregations, must they hear words that have no meaning? Or would it be better for them to understand a simple worship of God in prayer?

It isn't how many syllables in a word of prayer, but the sincerity of the prayer that matters. God does not expect us to impress Him with our language, He wants us to worship with our hearts and lead our minds to a better understanding of His truth.

There is a true story of a lawyer father who wrote to his evangelist father asking him to not bring religion to his children. In his letter he stated in very clear terms that the example of his father is what lead him away from the church. This evangelist, who would say whatever he needed to climb up the corporate Christian ladder, had damaged so many along the way. He was an absent father in the name of his own ministry and refused to even listen to the questions of his own son. And that son, now a father in his own right, did not want his own children to be exposed to that kind of religion. He wanted his children to see Jesus instead.

If we are to feed the sheep, we are to feed them that which is true, that which is holy, that which leads them closer to the owner of the flock. We are but shepherds of His flock. If we use the flock for our own goals, we are no better than the evangelist father who until today continues to use ministry to further his own personal goals while his son waits for him to recognize his own folly.

Jesus, though the Messiah, never made it about Him. He always pointed to God. Even unto Calvary, the glory and the honor was for God and Him alone.

Feed the sheep.

Jesus entreats Peter to feed his flock so that they may grow to know God as their Shepherd so the focus isn't on Peter or the disciples. The focus was not on a building, the focus was not on tradition, treatise, or apologetics, but the focus was on God.

The sheep know the voice of their shepherd. Because, perhaps, even while grazing they are aware that their protection, their care, their future lay with the Shepherd.

Though they walk through the valley of the shadow of death, they do not fear. Because they know their God—the one His church lead them to, the one who cared for them, the one who constantly feeds them truth—that same God will be their comfort and strength unto all their days.

But, like Peter, His church is asked to give up their past shortcomings, discard their guilt, leave behind their fear. For a church that wallows in the unworthiness of their guilt and wraps itself in the fear of all things physical, emotional, and spiritual cannot, and will not, know God.

Jesus calls us to feed His lambs, care for, and feed His sheep—even the ones who may not be in our fold. But Jesus also asks us, like Peter, to not dwell on the past missteps in faith.

Too often we berate ourselves before God. Telling Him that we are not worthy, we are awful, we are like dirt. The Creator God of all things perfect did not send His Son to die for the unworthy; He sent His son to bring home the lost. We are worthy of a Savior and our Father sent us one. Do not belittle His gift of salvation or the worth He sees in each one of us.

Jesus needed Peter to see beyond his denial the night of the arrest. He needed Peter to understand that he is worthy of being given the privilege of growing the group of believers into a flock foundational to the future of His remnant.

We are that remnant. We are the ones tasked to reflect the light of Jesus and bring in the flocks of believers and care for them as Jesus did for the Samaritan.

Even the early church, not that far removed from Jesus' life, needed reminding. And through Paul, God tells the church in Galatia, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are one in Christ Jesus."

No one can take that validation from you. You are uniquely created in Genesis, redeemed in the gospel, and will live His Revelation until the end of time.

Be the reflection of that Jesus. The one who died for all. The one who cared for all. The one who says in the quietness of the morning by the lake, "Feed my lamb, care for my sheep, feed my sheep." And like bringing healing to the hurting He then says, "Follow me."

All the way through history and into the Second Coming.