

Sunday, May 7, 2017

I Peter 2:19-25

John 10:1-18

### Sharing and Caring

Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed! As we continue in our celebration of Christ's resurrection in this season of Easter let us rejoice for Jesus is alive and His Spirit is with us now!

What is one of the first lessons each of us learns? Sharing what you have with another individual but this lesson does not always come easy for we are given so much as infants and then as toddlers. But when children are to play together a key lesson of course is to share. Robert Munsch's children's story, We Share Everything highlights this concept of sharing as kindergarten children all end up swapping shoes, pants and shirts creating chaotic moments for the teacher! But what does it mean to share today not only within the church, city, community and around the world? And why do we share at all? That is, why do we give of ourselves for the sake of other people?

Before Jesus died on the cross and rose again he taught many people using examples of faithful living by drawing from current jobs and tasks that people did regularly at that time. Through every day examples of farming or using tools or discussing grapes and olives, Jesus illustrated the way to live according to God's love. His examples were considered good lessons but many of the teaching moments became lost when those listening to him did not fully understand that he was the Son of God, the Messiah, or the one who would die for their redemption. It was not until after Jesus ascended into heaven that even his closest followers, the disciples, realized the depth of his thoughts and teachings.

In our reading from John, Jesus talks about shepherds and sheep pens, he talks about these people being gates and protectors for their animals. Any shepherd or farmer might relate to this task because it was not an easy job to watch after and protect sheep day and night. Why did the sheep need such protection? Animal predators, rough rocky terrain, water sources, good grass to eat and of course safety from wandering away at night and not knowing how to return. Sheep need a shepherd to guide them and so a good hired hand or young relative of the farmer would be taught how to care for the sheep and to protect them through the use of a staff. Sometimes the shepherd would lead his sheep out to distant areas and stay there for days. Being a good shepherd he created a temporary corral, a pen to keep the sheep in when they

were not grazing. Using the crude stones of the field a shepherd could quickly put together such a structure and at night he would lay his body down in the opening of this corral making himself the door. No sheep could wonder away at night unless it stepped over the sleeping shepherd and no wolf could come in to do harm without waking the shepherd. He is the gate.

Or if the shepherd was close to the home farm area and it was time for rest he would call the sheep together and they would follow him. He would then count them as they entered the sheep pen and then he would take up the post as the gate. If any animal wanted in or out, they would have to walk over the shepherd.

The shepherd guarded these animals from the time they were born through shearing times, as well as times of reproduction and even in to their older ages. The sheep depended upon the shepherd and trusted them. The shepherd's livelihood was at stake with these sheep and if any were lost or killed it was deemed his responsibility. The sheep depended on the shepherd for they would learn their Master's voice and follow it knowing that he would protect them? More than any other duty the goal of the shepherd is to protect the sheep and if the sheep looked good and were content, then others would know that they had a good shepherd.

Jesus describes the shepherd's tasks and those listening understand what this is all about. But then Jesus puts himself into the story—saying, "I am the gate for the sheep. All who enter the sheepfold will be safe. "This meant that He would be the one who comes in and out and finds the safe pasture for the sheep. Then Jesus states, "I have come that they may have life and have it to the full." I don't really think he was talking about sheep any longer! For he continues, "I am the good shepherd and I know my sheep and my sheep know me." At this point Jesus has put an emphasis on the relationship between shepherd and sheep which those listening would understand! The relationship of caring for what they are to looking after and sharing what the shepherd does each day. When we think of this relationship of sharing and caring yes, the sheep benefits at survival and producing wool but so does the shepherd as he earns his wage.

How many relationships might we think of that are similar? Infants or babies totally depend on their parent for care and this relationship never seems to really end. Another such relationship is also between people and their pets especially dogs. But to fully understand this sheep and shepherd illustration, Jesus goes on to say that he also the one who lays down his life for his sheep because he cares for them. The good shepherd knows his sheep and they

know him. He shares of himself every day and cares for the welfare of each sheep. Sharing and caring is not something that just happens it takes time, effort and commitment without seeking anything in return but love.

A church in San Francisco was known to serve meals for people in need for many years. Over the doorway to its dining room there is a sign which is CARITATE DEI \*in Latin. One day a young man who was recently released from hospital and new to the area entered the church and sat down for a meal. He was enjoying his lunch when he asked the woman who was cleaning the table next to him. "When do we get on our knees and do the chores?" he asked. She said, "You don't." Then when do we have to listen to the sermon, he questioned. She answered him, "There aren't any." "How about the lecture on living the good life?" Not here she said.

The man was suspicious and then kept quiet. "What's the gimmick?" The woman pointed to the sign over the doorway. He wasn't sure what the Latin meant so he asked the woman, "What does that mean in English?" The woman came over to him and started explaining what the church was doing in helping reaching out to others- providing the meals for strangers. She said, "We provide the food in order to fulfil our mission as sheep of the Good Shepherd. Jesus taught us that he is the Good Shepherd and so for us to be good sheep we share and care for others "out of love for God."

Just consider Glenwood Church for a moment—what do we do 'out of love for God'? Yes we support outreach programs of The UCC Downtown Mission, the Windsor Youth Centre, and The Hiatus House on a regular basis. Through our benevolent fund we support individuals and families with specific financial needs on a short term basis. And we also support the breakfast program at Roseville Public School, the Campbell soup label collections for school supplies, and even collect used postage stamps for the Canadian Bible Society to distribute Bibles in different languages. Internationally we have supported St. Antoine's School in Haiti and we continue to support Save Africa Child Uganda. We also support the Mission and Service fund of the United Church as this money reaches others around the world through specialized ministries as well as in Canada.

Yet as church we share and care for others within our church family—those who are grieving the death of loved ones, those who are welcoming infants and children into their families and supporting families with children. We are learning about God together through

Sunday School, youth classes, confirmation classes as well as Bible study groups and through singing and playing music in the choir and youth band. And we all prayerfully become better sheep because we believe in the Good Shepherd who died and rose again for us.

But what do you do “out of love for God.” You might work at a job you enjoy but are you just doing the tasks needed or out of love for God? Do you do your work with the hope of extra compensation or satisfaction knowing that you did your best work? This could also be as students- are you putting your best effort forward in time and energy and it is good work or is it just good enough to get by? Sometimes we grow tired of doing similar work but do we really recognize the fact that whatever we do should be done ‘out of love for God? This is because God gave us his Son Jesus out of love and he died for our sake so that we might be forgiven. Jesus is alive and with us now; he is the Good Shepherd and continues to call sheep to him. Does he know your name? Are you a good sheep and willing to follow? Are you willing to love others because he cares for you? Sharing is caring and this is what Jesus’ story of the Good Shepherd leads us all to do—“Caritate DEI-out of love for God.” Come let us share with one another in Christ’s love as we care one for another through life’s challenges and celebrations. Let us rejoice for we are one in Christ and one with each other. Thanks be to God.