

Scripture: John 21:15-19

Message: "Feed My Sheep"

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Pastor Jack Van de Hoef

How many of you have a pet in or around your home? I know that some people here live on a farm where you have many animals to care for. For those of you who have a pet fish, what do you think your fish would do if you tossed a slice of toast in the fish tank? What do you think your pet dog would do if you fed it a bowl of sunflower seeds? Would the cows be impressed with eating hot dogs?

Probably not. Animals, whether pets or not, are given food that is appropriate for them. They need that to stay healthy. They need food or they will die.

We all need food. That is the way God made us. When you go home from church, or sometime this afternoon, you will have lunch. We enjoy our regular meals. We might complain when meals are late or if there is not enough food.

When our Lord talks about the work that is done among his followers and by his followers he talks about feeding. Feed my lambs. Feed my sheep.

Jesus gives these instructions after enjoying some breakfast on the beach with his disciples. Remember, this is just a week or two after his resurrection.

Jesus is speaking to his disciple Peter. This is the same Peter who had denied Jesus three times on the night of Jesus' trial, the night before Jesus died. It's very likely that the three times Jesus asks Peter about his love is going back to the three times he denied Jesus. But it's interesting to note that Jesus is not making a huge deal out of Peter's denial. He doesn't lecture Peter with something like: "How could you! And do you know how much you hurt me..."

Jesus is clearly restoring Peter to his place as an accepted and chosen disciple of Jesus. Jesus is showing his forgiveness of Peter and challenging him to continued service.

The forgiving grace and love of Jesus is amazing, fantastic and complete. It's also as ordinary as conversation over a fish-fry for breakfast. Let that sink in this morning.

Maybe you read or heard the story of Peter's denial a couple of weeks ago, before Good Friday. You felt the pain of that betrayal. You felt the disappointment. How could Peter have done such a thing to Jesus?!?

The grace of our God forgives someone like Peter. The grace of our God forgives you.

How could Peter continue to serve Jesus after what he had done? By the grace and forgiveness of Jesus. How can you serve Jesus, knowing your imperfections and sins and secrets that you don't let others know? By the grace and forgiveness of Jesus. How can you stand here and accept the responsibilities of serving as an Elder or Deacon or Pastoral Care Worker? How can you consider teaching Kids Club or GEMS or Cadets, or leading a Bible study, or praying with someone, or being a friend, or anything for the Lord?

Because it's not about you and how good you are. It's the grace and forgiveness of Jesus. His grace is amazing, and it's as ordinary as a fish-fry breakfast on the beach. Jesus accepts you for who you are, with the gifts and abilities he has given in the power of the Holy Spirit, and says: Alright, now go and use those gifts. Follow me. Feed my sheep. Feed my lambs.

Identifying sheep and lambs does not necessarily mean specific different ages of followers of Jesus, namely children, youth and adults or seniors. To speak of sheep and lambs means the entire flock of the Good Shepherd, Jesus. That flock includes lambs, young children as well as new Christians. That flock includes sheep who are prone to wander and are dependent in everything. That flock includes lambs and sheep who need food, nourishment, care, and love. Jesus instructs or commissions his followers to be his under-shepherds, caring for his flock.

What is the food that we must be feeding to the flock? Consider the following verses:

"...people do not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD." (Deuteronomy 8:3)

"How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (Psalms 119:103)

"Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare." (Isaiah 55:2b)

"Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding." (Jeremiah 3:15)

Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty...I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, they will live for ever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." (John 6:35,51)

The food that the lambs and sheep need is the Word of God, both the written Word and living Word, Jesus. We have a responsibility to feed this word through Bible study and through living example. The central focus of our activities together must be feeding on the Word of God. That must be done in a context where that word is understandable, digestible, applying to the life of the lambs or sheep in a way that it helps them grow.

That food must also be Jesus Christ, who calls himself the living bread. To feed on Christ does not just happen at the Lord's Supper or Communion. To feed on Christ is to believe in him as Saviour. It is to trust in him and to grow in love for him. Feeding on Christ is learning how to give yourself to Jesus more and more so that he directs your life. Follow me, says Jesus.

Those instructed to feed the lambs and sheep must also help those under their care to feed on Jesus. This requires that they already feed on Jesus themselves. Then they can show how Jesus is important and helpful and valuable for their own lives.

Which brings us to another question to ask ourselves: What does your daily menu consist of? Are you being fed, or feeding yourself, a balanced diet? How much time is spent on feeding from the Bible or feeding from a screen? How much time is spent in learning from Christ?

What other diets are we taking in? This is not just the physical food we eat, but the diet of what feeds our minds and hearts, our ideas and attitudes. We may easily shrug off those other diets as just part of life and they really don't have much influence. But they do. When we feed on them, they make us who we are. They influence how we live, how we treat others, how we serve, how we think.

What is the purpose of feeding someone, or feeding ourselves? So that we and others can live and be the people God intends us to be. So that we can do what God intends for us to do. As we feed sheep and lambs, it is not just to give more information. It is to equip each other for life.

Our feeding nourishes men, young and old, to live out respect for women, young and old.

Our feeding nourishes language of respect and honesty.

Our feeding nourishes lives of integrity and truthfulness.

Our feeding nourishes lives of service to others.

Our feeding nourishes expressions of grace and forgiveness, even as we have experienced that grace and forgiveness.

What does this look like? How do we feed sheep and lambs?

- Mentor or tutor a student
- Read to a class
- Visit the elderly
- Serve at church
- Talk about your faith at work
- Provide a meal for someone
- Read the Bible and share with others
- Provide transportation to someone who needs it
- Do devotions and pray with your spouse/family
- Pray with your child/ren, grandchild/ren
- Sponsor one of the youth for Love Stinks
- Invite a friend, neighbour, co-worker to church
- Offer to pray with someone in need
- Give someone a gift just because, and tell them God loves them
- Babysit so the parent(s) can have a night out

You don't have to do everything on that list. You don't have to do anything on that list. These are only some examples of the ordinary things that we can do to "Feed my sheep. Feed my lambs." It's not some kind of amazing work that we have to do. This is not just for people with special responsibilities like elders, deacons or pastoral care workers. This is not just the job of the pastor. It is the ordinary work of sharing the Word and being the presence of Jesus to others, like a fish-fry breakfast on a beach.

These words from Jesus are for each one of us: "Feed my sheep. Feed my lambs."

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." (Colossians 3:16)

Amen.