“”

Rev. Debra McGuire

Bethany Presbyterian Church

Psalm 23

John 21:15-19

April 21, 2024

***Psalm 23***

***The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.  
2    He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;  
3    he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths  for his name’s sake.***

***4Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff,  
    they comfort me.***

***5You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.  
6Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord  
    my whole life long.***

***John 21:******15-19***

***When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”*** ***He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.” 16A second time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.” 17He said to him the third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” And he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. 18Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.” 19(He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, “Follow me.”***

Our scripture this morning continues the stories of Jesus appearing here and there after his resurrection, but before his final ascension to God. Remember, three times now, Jesus has appeared in the midst of the disciples who were behind locked doors. Jesus has also appeared to Cleopas and another on their walk from Jerusalem to the city of Emmaus. Often this particular Sunday, the fourth Sunday of Easter is referred to as Shepherd Sunday because our lectionary provides us with images of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, texts that describe Jesus finding the one lost sheep, texts about Jesus gathering his sheep, as well as Psalm 23 describing the Lord as a Shepherd. The gospel of John that Chris read for us this morning, takes place on the shore of the Sea of Tiberius. In this telling, the disciples have witnessed Jesus coming into their locked room, have seen him eat – not a ghost then, have heard about Jesus appearing outside of Jerusalem, and many weeks have gone by. Confused and discouraged by Jesus’ death, the tumult in Jerusalem, Jesus appearing in such strange places and in strange ways – they wondered, now what? So they went back to their lives. They went fishing. Simon Peter and others have gone out in a boat, they have been fishing all night, and they have not caught a thing. They come to the shore at daybreak, seeing a man they guess to be Jesus, once again appearing to them. This appearance, Jesus tells them to put down their nets on the other side of the boat, and they will catch a full nets worth of fish. So they have breakfast on the beach.

That is where Jesus then says to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” Peter said to Jesus, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.” 16A second time Jesus said to Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.” 17Jesus said to Peter the third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” And Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.

Some say that this particular text was inserted particularly at the end of the Gospel of John, because without this ending, the gospel would have ended with Peter denying Christ, three times. Today’s text allows the gospel lesson to end having given Peter this chance to reclaim his love of Christ, also three times.

What I love, an idea that is not my own, is that Jesus’ response to Peter’s love is toward the other. Jesus didn’t say “If you love me, worship *me*. If you love *me*, build *me* a church, play great music in *my* honor, speak great prayers and sermons and show *me* how much you love *me*. – Do you love me? Make sure to compare each other according to who shows their love for me the most.” Jesus’ concern was for the other. Do you love me? Feed my lambs – Do you love me? Tend my sheep. – Do you love me? Feed my sheep.

This isn’t the first time we have heard Jesus tell us to take care of his sheep, love and serve our neighbor, love our enemies, welcome the stranger, etc. We hear those texts and respond with asking ourselves who is my neighbor? Love our enemies – who is my enemy? Who is the stranger? Who is the other that we are looking for?

If we apply this to our hope of increasing the Bethany family, what we really hope for is that Bethany is a place for people to belong. If you have been at Bethany for a long time, and you have a sense that you belong here, it might be hard to imagine anyone new not immediately feeling the same way. I want to challenge us. I want to suggest that while we are very good at being welcoming, we are lax in following up and helping those same people that we welcome to actually feel like they belong.

What is the difference between being welcomed and feeling as if we belong? Welcome is coming over for dinner, belonging is staying for a slumber party. Welcome is coming to the concert, belonging is being taught how to sing/play.

Maybe you can see the difference if I tell a story of two cups. One day in a thrift store, I saw two great cups, and I couldn’t decide which one I wanted to get. I finally decided to get the coffee mug instead of the china cup because the cup said – sit for a bit; the mug said stay as long as you want. Welcome and belonging are like the difference between these two coffee cups!

Welcome is when we choose the menu; Belonging is when we are open to a new menu. In other words, I hold all the cards, I have all the knowledge, and I will offer you what you would love. Belonging though is being curious about what the other knows, loves, needs, and listening more and talking less.

I’d like to play a video now about something called Radical Belonging. This video is part of a book tour of the activist, speaker, author, founder of the Empower Initiative, Rev. Ben McBride. Ben and his brother James are activist in the bay area who have been working for years in our community to foster communities of belonging. Rev. Ben McBride has worked to decrease gun violence, foster belonging, foster strong relationships between communities and public safety organizations and police departments. In this clip, discussing his book, “Trouble the Waters: The Urgent Work of Radical Belonging” Rev. McBride suggests that we need to widen our circle of concern. Let’s hear what he has to say and then we’ll have a discussion.

**Video Clip** (8:14 to 12:06)

<https://www.seattlechannel.org/videos?videoid=x150875>

What are some of your first thoughts?

What did you notice? What stuck out?

How might this apply? (to an organization you are a part of, to life at Bethany, to our definitions of neighbors, sheep, strangers)

What might you take away?

Let us pray….

<https://www.benmcbride.com/the-book>

<https://www.empowerinitiative.org/>