

SERMON FOR SUNDAY, APRIL 18, 2010**ST. PAUL'S CHURCH – MICHIGAN**

Perhaps not unlike here but in a different way, when I lived in Quebec it happened that I conducted many funerals, perhaps more funerals than weddings or baptisms. In a way different than here, most of the funerals were for folks who were somehow connected with the particular church that I had at the time. What I remember most about those funerals was a tradition of what happened in the community and the church at the news of a death. Within a short time of receiving the news of a death a phone tree was put into action. One person would phone another with the news and the details. But then not to be just the sharing of news it was also the arranging of food and meals. It was always understood who would be looking after what food and the only details to be worked out were the 'where' and the 'when'. I suppose that that ritual is played out in many other places but it was something that I had never seen before. My understanding of what was taking place as I saw it played out time and again is that they looked after each other...the people looked out for one another.

The Gospel for this Sunday is about one of the appearances that Jesus again made to the disciples following the Resurrection. The story we heard is about the disciples fishing and not being able to catch anything. Standing on the shore was Jesus but evidently the disciples did not recognize that it was him. Jesus told the disciples to through the net out to the right side of the boat and there they would

catch some fish. They caught fish, filled their nets and they ate breakfast together and they recognized that it was Jesus who was now with them. But then Jesus had some personal words for Peter. Three times Jesus asked Peter the same question. He asked him "Simon Peter, do you love me". Peter answered in the same way each time, saying "yes Lord, you know that I love you". With that answer each time Jesus gave him something to do... 'feed my lambs, tend my sheep, and feed my sheep'. This morning I want to make a couple of comments about what Jesus was asking Peter to do.

Firstly Jesus was asking Peter to look after or to care for those who were following in the new way and trying as best as they could to be found faithful. Moving from what Jesus was asking of Peter to our church life...do you suppose that Jesus would be asking of us just as he asked of Peter, if we love him, and then as we say that we do love him, Jesus would say feed each other, tend to each other, look out for each other? There is a truth that we all know and that we have probably all quoted at some time or another. The truth is that we never know what goes on in a person's or a family's home. When the door is closed at their home we don't always know what is said and done. Extending that truth, those same persons may very well come attend church on Sunday morning and they may attend one of the churches in St. Clair and they may well attend St. Paul's. And doing the math, if they come to church 52 Sundays of the year you can bet that not every one of those Sundays is going to be a good Sunday for them or a day when everything is going right or a Sunday when their mind and their life doesn't have some clutter going on. Jesus

asked Peter, "do you love me". "You know that I do" was his answer. Jesus then said 'look after them'. In this church we keep busy doing the things that we believe and know that God is calling us to. It is true that we are reaching out and there is no shortage of things happening here. And more than likely amidst what we are doing, or in kneeling at the altar or in the quietness of our prayers or as we share the stories of where we have seen God...God speaks to us and asks us if we love Jesus, if we love God and as like Peter we say yes we do. God then speaks to us saying look after each other. Every one of us at some time or another has visited another church when we have been away from here. Isn't it true that when you look from the outside in, you can tell if folks within a congregation or church are looking out for one another, if they are looking after one another. In the course that I took while on sabbatical there was a reading that had to do with a common misunderstanding of pastoral care. The misunderstanding that was being referred to is that clergy are the only people who provide the pastoral care...because that is what they are just paid to do and besides who else would know how to look after people. The reading went on to say how incorrect to think that others don't also have a care to provide that is pastoral and have a responsibility to look after each other. Jesus said to Peter, after Peter confirmed that he did in fact love him...Jesus told him to feed the lambs and the sheep to tend the sheep. Here at St. Paul's and thinking more individually than collectively, how are we doing in looking after each other...how are we doing in caring for each other? Nothing will warm the soul more and help to keep faith alive than the care and the concern and the love that we offer to each other. Feed my

lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep. Look after one another and take care of one another.

Secondly there is another dimension to what I have just been saying and this time it is not about giving but it is about receiving. Before my online class really got started in terms of the reading, we were asked to write a couple paragraphs about who we are and then we were asked to write about our recollection of the first time that we were on the receiving end of pastoral care...not the giving end but rather the receiving. It is interesting you know...it took me much longer to answer that question about receiving pastoral care than it did about giving pastoral care. And so let us bring that question out of the classroom and into our own church life. When have you been on the receiving end here, in this church life of someone else doing their best to put into practice what Jesus told Peter, feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep? If you are like me, it feels easier to give instead of receiving; it feels more comfortable to give rather than to receive. I wonder how many times it has happened that folks have tried out a new church or have returned to church after a time of being away and after a few Sundays or a couple of Sundays they have decided that such and such a church is not for them. The reason that it is not for them is because the people don't seem to care and they don't seem to reach out and they seem distant. But if the truth were known the care and the reaching out and the heart is there, it is just not being received. Sometimes when we see the lambs being fed and the sheep being tended, it feels better to want to be the ones who are giving, than the ones receiving.

Now a word needs to be said about life. You will recall that on Easter Sunday I spoke about life and I asked you about some of the possible places where you might be finding life, and here at St. Paul's. I suggested that if you are finding life in those places, then you are finding the risen Christ and the very presence of God. When the disciples had finished eating breakfast with Jesus, he then called Simon Peter aside and he asked him if he loved him and he said yes and then Jesus said feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep. And they knew in all that was happening...the casting their nets again, and the sharing of a breakfast meal and in Simon Peter being told to take care of and look after those who were to follow...they knew that Jesus was very much alive and that there was life. When we do the same here, be assured and doubt not that there is present life and where there is life, there is the risen Christ.

Rev. Glenn H. Stone