

Stewardship Message by Debra Lund – March 21, 2021

John 21: 15-17

¹⁵ 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." ¹⁶ A 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." ¹⁷ He 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."

Our theme verse this year is "Feed My Sheep" from John 21. Jesus replies three times to Peter's three statements of love that he needs to feed my sheep. In other words, Jesus clearly states that one cannot just say they love the Lord, but need to show their love by "feeding the Lord's Sheep."

Caring and serving is one of the seven focuses of stewardship promoted by the ELCA. And, serving is one of the five gifts of discipleship: serving all people, following the example of Jesus that we're examining during our mid-week Lenten services. Loving our neighbor as ourselves, and loving the Lord, our God, are the two great commandments. Doing what we can do to care for and serve others is being Christ to our neighbor. Our caring and serving, like all forms of stewardship, are most rewarding for both the giver and the receiver.

Growing up on a farm, I learned to love and care for animals. We had sheep throughout my childhood, and invariably had some bottle lambs that started out in the house each lambing season. My parents taught me to care for people, too. They both lived lives of care and service, especially my dad. He served as American Legion Commander and other positions with the local post. Dad was on township boards, elevator-COOP boards, Church Council, ushered, and served on the local community retirement apartment board called Parkview for over 53 years.

My parents were good friends and neighbors. Each of us can be a good friend and neighbor. Many of us can do even more in how we serve and care for each other.

It was instinctive for me to volunteer in various ways, starting in junior high school, through high school, college, and into adulthood. Church, school, community, and band activities have been my focus for volunteering.

Because of my love of kids and love of music, it was natural to go into teaching. Teaching is a God-given vocation that requires caring and serving. I am glad that now after retiring following 43 years of teaching, I can still utilize these gifts by giving private lessons (via Zoom these days), professionally; and voluntarily in activities like teaching Sunday School.

In addition to using one's own skills in caring and serving as God would want, I believe one can expand these gifts to include involving others who have the potential of such gifts. This could be inviting individuals who may need motivation, inspiration, or help with recognizing or in exploring their own gifts. We should be encouragers, and strive to do that regularly. There have been several instances when the words of others have made a profound difference in what I choose to do. Perhaps my actions would positively inspire others in their decisions, too. Back to teaching, I may not have followed that life-long vocation without the direction and encouragement of our high school band director, a good friend and mentor yet today.

The pandemic has created challenges for being community and serving as we would normally do, but it has also created opportunities. As stated every Sunday, I want to remind all of you to consider how you employ your God-given gifts each and every day, and how you can put them to use, despite all the hurdles that the pandemic world presents us. Each of us is blessed with talents and abilities that can be used to Feed Jesus' Sheep. Thanks be to God!