



THE NEW SHOFAR

***Nothing more to say: Feed my sheep.
Feed my Sheep. Feed my sheep.***



Easter 3: If you think you love me, feed my sheep and then ...

Without doubt, the fullness of the teaching and ministry of Jesus is embodied and fulfilled in the Love commandment. Equally true is the way the entire New Testament defines discipleship as loving Jesus by loving the Lord's commandments. Doing as Jesus demands, and imitating his ways in the way we are to live in the world... *I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.* This is what Jesus is saying to Peter in today's Gospel. He is to care for the sheep as Jesus cared for them. How much love is this? To the point of giving his life for them.

Not long before this, Peter had turned on his back on a commitment he had made earlier... *I will lay down my life for you!* There in the courtyard of the High Priest he had denied Jesus three times. Now Jesus offers a threefold "feed my sheep" command, as if to counter the earlier betrayal.

Peter is *grieved* – a strong word in the Greek defined as a word causing severe mental or emotional distress. It has the sense of a physical, mental, and spiritual pain. Therein sits the difference in the way the two view the world of ministry. The apostle still sees himself as being loyal to Jesus but Jesus on the other hand has had a bitter experience of his betrayal. What is now required is nothing less than a whole-of-life obedience, an obedience even to death.

Love God with the fullness of your heart, mind, body and soul

John uses two different words for love (in the Greek) but they are often used interchangeably in the scriptures. What John is doing is nothing less than including every aspect of human activity and our being under the same command to love and to feed the sheep that belong to Christ. Love is not a concept but a way of life.

This is brought down to a very human level when Jesus insists that Peter love the sheep more *than these*. Not more than the other disciples in the group but more than these fish they had dragged ashore. More than the boats, the nets and the things of his past life. These represented both his recreational and business activities. In other words, he was to put nothing ahead of his calling to be a feeder of God's sheep.

Here we see the final transformation of Peter from fisherman to shepherd. Instead of being a fisher of men, he is to be the shepherd of sheep. His tasks are twofold: *feeding* and *tending*. In the Bible, *feeding* is used both literally (give material food

to) and metaphorically (feed them with spiritual food). *Tending* includes a wide area of duties – guiding, guarding providing food and water. It is also used in the sense of govern and rule over.



Here is the rub for Peter. If his hurt has been redemptive and has turned from denying Jesus in order to save his own life, to giving his whole of self to Jesus even at the risk of losing his life, then an important transformation has taken place. This is highlighted in four images: (a) when you were young to when you are old...(b) you could fasten your own belt to have to endure another fastening it for you...(c) going to being taken and (d) going where you wanted to go to being taken where you do not want to go. This is John the writer making a significant point. Feeding and tending God's sheep is only going to happen when puts himself second to whatever it is obedience to Christ is demanding of him. Old men are helpless while young men want to determine their own futures. Taking up the invitation to serve Christ means he is no longer his own master and for we humans that is a huge ask.

Imitating Christ for Peter, obeying Jesus' command, tending and feeding the flock of God would bring him to his moment of absolute imitation – he was crucified upside down by the Romans.

I can only be a feeder and a tender of sheep if I walk in Christ

Important for fulfilling these commands of Jesus is what is revealed to us in the first reading from the Book of Revelation... *I, John, looked and heard the voices of many angels who surrounded the throne and the living creatures and the elders. They were countless in number...* Earlier John had given us a vision of the throne room in heaven. There was a throne in the middle of the heaven-scape and significantly, that throne was *occupied*. It is an image that should thrill us, fill us with a sense of boundless hope and provide us with a source of light in our darkest of moments. It screams out – God is ruling. God is not sitting there doing nothing but with Christ Jesus sitting at his right hand, on the same throne, the divine will is guaranteed. What God commands is on its way to being fulfilled, even when we cannot see it or even understand what is going on all around us. God reigns. God is reigning. God will always be on the throne ruling.



How can I know if I truly am loving God?

The answer Jesus gives to this question is amazingly simple – love without limit, feed without exception, include without questioning; see not before us a sinner to be avoided, but a brother or sister to be embraced and given a sense of belonging. Give and keep on giving, reach out and keep on reaching out. In other words, Love *as I continue to Love*, for those you see around you are my sheep. What you do to them you do to me.