

Feed Tend Feed: The Theological Standard for Outreach Ministries

15When 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." ~ John 21: 15-17

There is a lot going on in this brief and seemingly redundant exchange between Jesus and Peter. I think most of us are as hurt as Peter was with the repetition of the question "Do you love me?" Three times Jesus asks Peter this question. Three times Peter responds, "Yes". Three times Jesus says "Prove it." It is repetitive, yes, boring even, but it is also very grace filled. Jesus was offering Peter an opportunity for redemption here in this text for his having thrice denied Jesus during his time of trial. But that meaning only scratches the surface. This text offers us something even richer, but its meaning has been lost in translation. In the original Greek, the dialogue sounds more like a negotiation:

"Simon Peter do you **love** me?"

"Yes, Lord I **care** very much about you."

Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs."

"Simon son of John, do you **love** me?"

"Yes, Lord; you know that I **care** about you."

Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep."

He said to him the third time, "Do you **care** about me?"

"Lord, you know everything; you know that I **care** about you."

Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."

In the Greek, Jesus is asking Peter for the commitment of **agape** love—or the unconditional love of God: the love for all humanity, no matter who, no matter what. What Peter offers in response is **phileo** or brotherly/familial love (think Philadelphia). So Jesus gives Peter the task of feeding his lambs—perhaps to clarify his word choice—and then asks him again to commit to agape. And once again Peter could not do it. So Jesus tells him to tend his sheep. The third and final time he questions Peter, Jesus uses Peter's own language of phileo. He meets Peter where he is at. And with a final charge to feed his sheep, Jesus is demonstrating that the way to agape is through loving and serving others. Peter was already forgiven but with the words Feed/Tend/Feed he is charged to transform his own life by transforming the lives of others.

This passage from John is the theological standard for our outreach ministries. We too must respond to Jesus' question. **"St. Peter's do you love me? Then feed my lambs, tend my sheep, and feed my sheep."** And we are being intentional in our charge! Our *Local and Global Outreach Committee* has taken on a new name: **Feed Tend Feed** or **FTF Ministries**. Here is how we are already responding to our Christ defined mission!

We are feeding people through:

- Caz Cares
- The Friendship Inn
- The Samaritan Center
- Collecting coupons for military families serving overseas
- Crop Walk

We are tending to our neighbors' other basic needs such as providing clothing, healthcare, shelter and other safety needs:

- The Key
- Caz Cares
- Episcopal Relief and Development
- Dining for Women
- Collections for El Salvador
- Ride for the Rescue
- Prayer Shawls for those in the hospital or in transitions

The next feeding you do when all other needs are met is that of the mind. **How are we feeding and challenging minds? Also known as education and activism.** People won't do better until they know better. And well, we could be doing more to help there. Parish and Community Forum *ideas* include but are not limited to:

- Collaborate with the Library's village read of *To Kill A Mocking Bird* to discuss the sin of racism
 - Show the documentary *Traces of the Trade: A Story from the Deep North* and offer discussions
 - *The New Jim Crow* book discussion
- The issue of human trafficking --the new slavery
- Offer interfaith dialogue opportunities--General Convention had a lot of very heated debate about Israel and Palestine
- Offer parenting book groups. Have a discussion around *The Blessing of a B-* or *the Blessing of a Skinned Knee* or have a viewing of *The Race to Nowhere...*
- Environmental stewardship issues
- Responding in love to the epidemic of gun violence

As you can see, there are many ways to answer our call to agape love and I encourage everyone to get involved. Check our website for FTF events every month or see Gretchen Lipp.

"St. Peter's do you love me?"

"Yes, Lord, you know that we do!"

Blessings, Jeanne+