

13th Sunday after Pentecost – **August 23, 2009**

Isaiah 58: 6-12; John 21: 15-17; Colossians 3: 12-17

I have been packing this week – lots and lots of packing! Thanks to you all for your generosity and your enthusiasm for the trip to Malawi and South Africa. It is such a privilege to go to see the work of the church around the world and to bring these connections home to you. I have packed my camera and notebook along with the many supplies that have been donated. I've tried to pack sensible clothes and to include all the practical items that I may need. So it is with the idea of taking on my trip those things which will be useful, helpful and not too heavy that I selected the scripture texts for this morning. I chose my favorites – the ones that remind me what it is to love Jesus – what it means to be God's chosen – what God desires for me and from me.

I don't think that Jesus could be any clearer than he is with Peter in these parting words from the gospel of John...

John 21: 15-17

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."

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."

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."

If we love Jesus it is not just about us and our personal salvation but about how we live and work in the world – we are in God's world together. Jesus is the shepherd and we love him – show our love for him – as we tend and feed his sheep. It really is as uncomplicated as that at its root.

The Colossians passage is about how to behave when we have received God's grace...

Colossians 3: 12-17

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.

Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.

And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

There must be a joyfulness and thankfulness in my life that can be shared. This sense of wellbeing comes from Jesus Christ and the message that comes to me both in scripture and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Because I am a follower of Christ all that I am and all that I do should proclaim and honor that relationship.

The final selection is from Isaiah. It speaks of potential – of the oasis God hopes we will be...

Isaiah 58: 6-12

Is not this the fast that I choose:

to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, *Here I am*.

If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday.

The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.

It is my great longing and prayer that we fulfil God's desire to be like a watered garden – like a rebuilders and restorer in places of brokenness. We get distracted and misled by things in our world and in the church and forget our basic mission – to participate in and show forth God's loving purpose in the world. All our religious conviction and personal piety are worthless if we cannot be God's hands and feet and heart in the world. It is my prayer for the church and each one of us as individuals within the body of Christ that our light breaks forth – that we serve as the nurturing refuge God intends.

As I pack these texts in my luggage and renew their place in my heart in preparation for my trip to Africa I am praying for an attitude of openness and hopefulness. I need to suspend my western world way of seeing things so that I can see things in a new light. I will see poverty and hardship beyond what I have experienced, witnessed or imagined and I know that will shock me – throw me off balance. And it should. God help me if it doesn't.

I need to be open to realizing that seeing a different part of God's world might also help me to see a different part of God. I want to let this experience question my own inherent beliefs and concepts about God and creation. I want to take the opportunity to think more deeply about them. And when I return I hope to invite you into that journey.

As we watch these two video presentations I don't want you to be distracted too much by the calls for support of PWS&D or *Presbyterians Sharing...* While these are good and worthy endeavors for you to know about and support with your prayers and personal resources, today I want you to focus on how ***we are in this together.***

[Watch DVD here.]