

Holy Thursday - April 1

“Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?”

Luke 15:4 (NRS)

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.

John 21:17 (NRSV)

I was sitting in the back of church when the minister announced plans for a young adult retreat the next weekend. I like to think this was the third time he'd mentioned it (John's passage). There was just something different this time the way he said, "All are welcome, even if you've never participated before". The small voice told me that going to this retreat might not answer my prayers, but I didn't know that it wouldn't. That was the first step toward numerous small church groups ever since. You take turns listening and talking, accepting and encouraging, feeding and sometimes being fed. That retreat also was the first time I opened up in public about the tragic loss of my dad in a farming accident when I was just 19. I still think back on how hard it was on the farm and how hard was his loss. For example, when I was 13, we lost dozens of sheep to predators—neighbors' dogs. I always say that sheep are too gregarious to get lost, as in Luke's parable; they get separated before they get lost. Every night, regardless of the weather, my brothers and I rounded them up for their own safety. They knew they would be fed physically, but they would just circle and circle, maddeningly...until one would go through the opening, and then they all followed. Isn't our instinct to circle in our lives until someone leads us to where we should be in our spiritual barn, safe from the wolves in dog's clothing (worldly draws)? On that Sunday in 1988, I let myself be welcomed even though I was scared because I had never participated in a group before. Every so often when I need spiritual feeding, I think back to that first welcoming retreat and am reminded that I'm not alone in the flock, yet others might feel like they are. The Good Shepherd knows what it is like to be the Lamb and welcomes all 100% of us. In return, He only asks us to welcome others through the gate one at a time.

Jeff

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for Your Son's teachings, culminating in His sacrifice and resurrection to reach all 100 of us. Please help us to be fed with your lovingkindness so that the fullness of your Spirit helps us to feed others. Amen.