

Pastor Roy's Sermon from April 21, 2013

Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

As with any animal caregiver, a shepherd provides care and safety. The shepherd leads, the sheep follow. Animals are like that. Last night I tried feeding the horses twice. They were content to eat grass. The grass is good these days. I guess I'm the help who works on trees and maintenance, no sense in heading to the barn when they see me!

Jesus as the Good Shepherd leads, and we follow. But Jesus called Peter and his other friends to not only feed and be led, but to take care of one another, to feed the other sheep.

There is mutuality in this care giving. We are cared for by others, and we care for others. Jesus tells Peter that he must take responsibility now. He is going to be a leader in this movement. Like Peter there have been many leaders since the first century.

Despite much corruption in the history of the church, the followers of Jesus Christ have lifted up God's mercy, faithful love and the need to reflect God's goodness in issues of social justice and peace.

Now some take Jesus as a cure all who takes care of us and makes everything better. A spiritual savior who pulls us out of our troubles and saves us from evil. For many the ultimate concern is spiritual, that is, God and "Getting right with God." How we treat the earth and how we treat the poor is mainly important when it results in people finding God. I believe we are called to love God's people and God's creation because God does the same.

Salvation is not mainly about the future, salvation is now. Jesus is not mainly coming sometime in the future to rescue us and destroy the earth as some proclaim, but he comes daily to show us compassion and mercy. Are we ready when he comes? Do we miss the visits of our risen Lord?

How do we cooperate with this living, dying, rising, returning Lord in the weaving together of the strands of our lives into mercy and peace? How do we relate to each other, to the poor, to the earth which supports all of life as we know it.

The Church has done much to show many peoples the way to live so that love, faithfulness, and mercy flourish. We must continue to do this.

But today we have other responsibilities as well. We must think about technology and how to faithfully use it. We must also keep an eye on God's creation. It is not disposable as some seem to think. The more we study ourselves and creation, the more we realize we are connected and cannot be separated from creation. There is a unity that is the basis of all of life. You find this throughout the Bible. There is no assumption that the point of life is to escape the difficulties of living and dying. You don't see that in words of Jesus or the apostles either. Why is it so many Christians think the goal of life is to escape this world?

If we turn our back on creation, we are turning our back on ourselves and our future. Jesus calls us to care for one another. Part of that is caring for creation.

With our own limited resources, it is a challenge to care for the earth. We are tempted to choose nice things which cheaply bring us physical comfort but result in wastefulness and pollution. The cheapest way is not

usually the faithful way. Our true values are revealed by the choices we make. It's not what we say or think, it's what we do. It's where we invest our resources and how we invest our resources.

Tomorrow is Earth Day. A reminder that the earth is the living system from which we draw life. We are often not mindful of how each of us affects the health of the planet. Carbon emissions. Pollution. Even the way we take care of our yards—the over use of fertilizers and pesticides which bleed into streams and creeks, perhaps unnecessarily killing off parts of the bottom of the food chain.

Can we take the time to ask “Why?” Why do I do what I do? Let us dare to ask questions which challenge the status quo.

I'm guessing we all think, “Oh, what difference can I make?” or, “I can't afford to live any differently.” Ultimately we have to face the reality that we find money for the things we value. We have priorities and we invest accordingly.

The Creator cares for Creation. The Good Shepherd, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Creator are one. Therefore, if we would follow this One who cares so deeply about us, who also cares so deeply about creation, then we must truly follow. We are co-shepherds with Jesus. We care for God's people, plants and creatures. We care for the earth.

In our Acts reading today, the faithful send two to call for Peter. “Please come without delay!” Peter immediately comes and prays. He then speaks to Tabitha, “Get up!” She opens her eyes and sits up. He holds out his hand and helps her up.

The faithful were concerned, he came. He cared. But not only for the sick and dying, but also for outcasts. The tanner with whom Peter stayed was an unclean Jewish outcaste. Not only did he talk to the tanner, he stayed with the tanner. Peter let go of the old ways. Superficial appearances. Assumptions. Prejudices.

He learned that he had much in common with old enemies and people he may have despised.

Who is the Good Shepherd calling you to feed? That's how this faith works. All who have faith feed others. We feed one another. We accept one another, despite our flaws and weakness.

How is the Good Shepherd calling you to feed and care for the planet?

Together we gather around the lamb, our Lord. This Shepherd who gave his life for the sheep. Who guides us to the springs of the water of life. Who wipes every tear from our eyes, not denying sorrow, but embracing *us in it* and all who sorrow today.

It's been a difficult week for many...in a public way. There is always plenty of sorrow to go around. But many relive their own pain when they see disaster, and accidents, and violence.

We join together with the Good Shepherd to shepherd those who are our neighbors, and friends, and family. The sick, the dying, the poor, the lost, the lonely, the endangered, and the planet upon which we all live.

God give us courage and imagination for faithfulness.
And may God be merciful to us in every way. Amen.