



May 1, 2022 - The Third Sunday of Easter

My Disciple? Feed my sheep.

The Reverend Nick Morris-Kliment

Christ Episcopal Church, Needham, MA

May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts, be always acceptable in your sight, our Rock and our Redeemer.

On Friday night, our Confirmation Class, along with a couple of intrepid parents, spent the night here at the Church, as part of the City Reach program. Earlier in the day, all the clothes and toiletries that the parish had donated were sorted, bagged, and taken into Boston to be distributed on Saturday. The kids gathered to help with that, and then to make lunches for Saturday, and to share a pizza dinner and some games. Friday evening, a virtual, interactive program was beamed out via Zoom from Old South Church to the suburban parishes and schools who were taking part. Each member of all the groups, as well as the City Reach staff, many of whom are unhoused or formerly unhoused, introduced themselves by name, along with their favorite foods. We were reminded that each of us has names and histories. We are known to God by name, and so should we be known to one another.

The kids then walked around their towns, in our case, in Needham, for an hour, seeking to answer these kinds of questions: where would I spend the night outside? Where would I charge my phone? Where would I go to the bathroom? Where would I feel safe? And other questions. They then regathered on Zoom to share and reflect on their answers together.

Saturday morning, arising at the crack of dawn from the comfort of the floor of the Memorial Room, the kids and chaperones arrived at the Old South Church at 7am for a day of relationship building over breakfast, over the distribution of clothes and toiletries, then lunch and more clothes and toiletry distribution, and then reflection on this experience together, in the light of the Gospel.

The City Reach program, currently reconfigured due to covid, is now in its 23rd year. Under the care of Common Cathedral, a Christian body based at our Cathedral that serves the homeless through worship, programs like Common Art, Boston Warm, Black Seed Writers Group, Monday Lunch and others, City Reach staff overlaps with the MANNA community, with whom our Monday Lunch program has been ministering for decades now.

It was made clear from the outset of the Zoom presentation that the purpose of City Reach is to teach people to see the image of God in one another. Building relationships between housed and unhoused people in the light of the Gospel is the means to that end. This begins with knowing someone's name, and sharing food, or at least, sharing what your favorite food is.

Relationships and food. They go together. And they can be transformative for our life with Jesus.

The Gospel story shows us this.



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Jesus is holding a fish fry on the beach. After Peter and his fellows endure a night of unsuccessful fishing, Jesus calls out to them from the beach to try again in a different spot. And behold, they are wildly successful. The abundance is overwhelming. They bring themselves and the fish in, and Jesus invites them to breakfast, cooking the fresh fish that they had just caught, on a charcoal grill.

And then there is a remarkable conversation between Jesus and Peter.

Three times, Jesus calls Peter by his birth name, Simon, and asks him the same question: "Do you love me?" Three times, Simon replies, "Yes, Lord, you know I love you." And Jesus responds three times, slightly differently each time: "Feed my lambs," "Tend my sheep," and "Feed my sheep."

You may remember that Jesus had predicted that Simon Peter would deny that he is connected to Jesus three times. All four Gospels contain this feature. But the way that John recounts that denial is very specific. As he stands next to a charcoal fire, warming himself along with the servants and officers involved with bringing Jesus to his trial, Simon Peter is asked: "Are you not one of his disciples?" Simon Peter responds, "I am not." And again, as he continues to warm himself by the fire, he is asked, "Are you not one of his disciples?" And again, he responds, "I am not." A servant of the high priest asks Peter, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" but Peter again denied it.

But in the context of this meal, an abundant meal, the Risen Christ addresses Peter by name, forgives him, and three times gives him a way to live into a new discipleship relationship with him. With the strength from that forgiveness, Peter, who had denied being a disciple of Jesus before, now, with new life affirms again his commitment to Jesus, who sets out the parameters of discipleship: feed and tend my sheep.

In John's Gospel, being a disciple of Jesus means feeding and tending his sheep.

What does this mean for us?

First: thank you for supporting the Confirmation Class' efforts to be disciples, helping them to tend to and feed the marginalized who are close to Christ's heart. They learned names, and shared their names, and shared a meal, and in so doing learned to see the image of God in others and in themselves. And in helping them, we are living out discipleship of Jesus as well.

Second: Thank you to those who have been able to be part of our MANNA crew in one way or another, either as a cook, or as a purchaser of bananas, as a baker or a driver, with financial support. While we have missed eating with our MANNA friends at the Cathedral because of Covid, knowing their names because of the pandemic, nonetheless, in this way, we are still disciples, honoring the image of God in one another.



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Third: Thank you for your giving to our annual budget. Your financial support funds our Community Concerns Committee agenda. Community Concerns makes grants to dozens of organizations which tend and feed the marginalized who are among Christ's sheep. Our support helps us to be disciples of Jesus.

As we go through our days, in our various circles, at work, at home, in town, wherever we go, may we keep looking for ways to know other's names. May we always find ways to feed one another. May we never cease working to see the image of God in everyone. May we more and more seek Jesus' forgiveness and strength. May we continue to tend and feed his sheep as his disciples.

Amen.