

Matthew:5:1-11  
John 21: 15-17

Jan.3 1993  
Park Ave. Methodist

### WANTED:HOPE

This morning we shared in the reading of the 23rd Psalm, the Beatitudes, and part of the epilogue to John's Gospel. Each so very familiar to us all. The first two are illustrative of our condition, but the last--our obligation. The Psalmist sings of his complete and unconditional confidence--"The Lord is my shepherd-I shall not want". The Beatitudes stress spiritual and moral qualities, but the dialogue of Jesus the Christ and Peter, by the sea of Tibereas, provides us with a command to action. The first two are conditionals, the third is imperative. "Feed my sheep-Take care of my little lambs."

Now we know the story well.This is a record of one of the "appearances" after the ressurection, which may or may not have been included by the original author of John's gospel, but certainly considered authorative, by the early Church. And as we hear it today, it must be as clear and concise, as it must have been nearly 2000 years ago." Do you love me more than these?" You, Peter, who have denied me. You, who have so often misunderstood what I have been trying to teach. "Do you love me more that these?" Not, "Do you love me more than these other disciples? But,"Do you love me more than these other personal and worldly "things" that seem to get in the way?" "If. then, you love me more than these, then feed my sheep, take care of my little lambs"

Let me relate a story to you, to make a point. One that

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comes from a book of short stories, entitled "Wanted: Hope" from whence comes the title of this sermon. And the name of this short story is "the Flesh", not inappropriate on a Sunday that we celebrate the Service of Holy Communion.

This story is about a young Greek Orthodox priest, who asked to be sent, as his first assignment, to a war-torn and impoverished area. "In order", as he put it, "to bring as many lost sheep to the fold, as possible." He received that assignment, but after a few weeks, he began to feel that must have been just a romantic notion, for most of the people seemed very far from the "Path of God "

Then, one stormy night, after he had finished a large and tasty meal, for his wife was a very good cook indeed, he was in his study, comfortably reading the Psalms, when a little boy came to the door, drenched by the rain. His mother had sent him , to bring the Priest, to administer the Last Rites to a dying man.

When they arrived, the man was alone lying on a bare iron bed. The priest, wanting to know more about the situation, asked about his illness. But the boy, not wishing to tell him what he should have been able to see for himself, that the man was dying from starvation, said nothing.

The good Father, wanted to speak to the man about God and eternal things, but the man simply closed his eyes. So the Communion Chalice was prepared, and the boy raised the man up a little on the bed. As soon as the priest began to say, "In the name of the Father...", the man interrupted him

saying. "Give me-Give me". The priest was confused, and the man's mouth was half open saying , "Give me-Give me"---Then suddenly, a deep tender understanding exploded within the priest; such as a parent feels feeding a hungry child. And so he began to feed him, holding him close to his breast, one spoonful after another. The final words of that story, expressed by the dying man were, "My God-My God".

In this biting existential story, writing from his own experiences that grew out of the devastation of the 2nd World War and the bitter ravages of the Greek Civil War, Adonis Samarakis. juxtaposes the reality of the spiritual and the material food, if you will, that is necessary to sustain all of God's creatures. Without human food, our bodies die, without spiritual and loving food, God dies within us.

"Feed my sheep- Take care of my little lambs" Let me tell you another story.

This past September, I received a birthday card from a close friend, and with it a long letter, bringing me up to date with news about our mutual friends, as well as how his own life was going. And in his words, "It has been a bummer of a summer". And to be sure. for him it had been a "Bummer of a summer".

First, like so many, during these present economic times he was out of a job, and looking in vain for work in the area in which he was eminently qualified.--Secondly, he was undergoing many of the same frustrations that most parents face dealing with the maturing process of a teenager. Third,

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and far more important, he was exhausted from a summer taken up with the ministrations to a mutual friend of ours, who was mentally and physically, wasting away, dying from AIDS. Any of these, would cause most of us anxiety ,but certainly, all three together, by anyone's calculations, would add up to a "bummer--summer".

In responding to him, in an attempt to give some support, I suggested that given time, something would break in the employment market, and given time the teenage "growing pains" would disappear; and given time, even the pain of ministering to and watching the wasteing away and the death of our friend would fade. I told him that it was not so much the "laying down of one's life", but more the "laying out of one's life" for the Other. "you have done unto the least of these, you have done it unto Me." It is the giving of ourselves to the Other, even when we know there will be a cost. The "takeing care of the little lambs of Christ" often comes with a price ticket, emotionally or materially. It is what D. Bonhoeffer called the "Cost of Discipleship" When Jesus dares us to. "Feed His Lambs", he expects us to share the cost.

"Feed My Lambs--Take care of my little sheep" Now what do these two stories have in common? What should they mean to us today, as we share together the Celebration of that "Great Price-Ticket", paid by the Christ on the Cross? What could they mean to us as we look ahead to another New Year?

First, I think they serve to remind us that the trajedies

of life are not circumscribed by time or space. Whether we are referring to a Greek Civil War, or a revised program of ethnic cleansing that is presently taking place in the Balkans, or in Germany again; or a starving population, coupled by anarchy, in Somalia; or the ongoing debilitation of hardship, disease and death around us. These types of human activities existed at the time of Christ; they exist today; and, I suspect will exist tomorrow. But that does not mean that we can have no impact.

What these stories remind us of, as does John's Gospel, that from the time of Christ, if we are to call ourselves Christian, we must also call ourselves Peter. These stories, and these short verses, put into sharp focus, the classic example of God, working through the weak creatures of this world to bring comfort and love, and hope to the Other.

We are directed, imperatively so, by Christ, as John Wesley put so eloquently, to do "all the good you can, by all the means you can, at all the times you can, as long as you ever can."

And so my Christian brothers and sisters, as we join together here, in this Celebration of the Sacrifice of God's Love, and then as we walk through those doors to face another New Year, let that Love of God for us, work through us, for the Other, whomever that Other may be. Feed His Sheep--Take care of His little Lambs!

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Sunday, January 3, 1993

I. HOLY COMMUNION

- A. It has long been the custom...to celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Communion....and we like to announce...that the Table of our Lord is open to all...
- B. His Table is open to all...and we invite all of you to receive on this the First Sunday of a New Year...trusting that this may be an occasion of spiritual renewal, reaffirmation...to the will of God as it comes to us...
- C. Regarding procedure. The elements will be served to you in the pews by the ushers...upon receiving them, please hold them...

II. GREETING / VISITORS

- A. We greet the visitors...delighted you're here...join us downstairs for some refreshments. Be free in the sharing...sign one of the visitor cards, or leave a name in one of the Guest Books. Come, worship with us...work with us, too....outreach concerns.
- B. Minister in the name of Christ and it is in His loving spirit that we greet all of you...and wish you a Happy New Year...a year filled with many blessings to count - good health and happiness.
- C. Members: wear your name tags and go out of your way to make some new friends here today...

III. PARISH CONCERNS

- A. Note the announcements in the bulletin...Trustee Meeting on Monday night. "Hounds" and the Aldersgate Class both resume their regular weekly meeting schedules. Tuesday. Wednesday.
- B. Be sure to "sign up" with Michael Schaffield or Fran Ellison for the Fellowship Supper BUFFET scheduled for next Sunday evening. A good program of music and food and warm fellowship to celebrate together the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.. Special artists. Chancel Choir of South Hempstead United Church of Christ. Called COME SUNDAY II...some will remember the beautiful evening last year...close to 125 people here for it.
- C. How nice to welcome our dear friend, Rev. Kenneth Haleott, back to the pulpit...ordained minister of the UMC, Ken and Adrea have been living in Santorini, Greece in recent years...but come back

( over )

3. (continued) to the city and the country to renew family ties and their friendships. We have missed you both this past year and it's grand to have you back with us. We look forward to your message on HOPE...

#### CHRISTMAS REFLECTIONS AND COMMENTS

- A. It was a good Christmas for our Church! And I would thank all who had a part in making it so...especially those of you who took on extra responsibilities....and those who responded with a special Christmas gift. Christmas gifts are still coming in....and should put us over our budgeted goal in terms of our Christmas appeal.
- B. The Financial Canvass continues. Good news is that we are steadily climbing...now up to \$ 151,000...and \_\_\_ pledges... gratefully received. Our Financial Canvass Chairperson, Jim Perkins, got married this week in California and is due back next weekend. Let's get those last 50 pledges in and reach our dollar goal of \$160,000.
- C. And along with the pledge drive, be sure to pick up your box of weekly offering envelopes if you requested a box. We do not mail them out...save postage by picking up the box that has your name on it... If you didn't pledge and would like a box to record your weekly gifts, speak to John Moore, our Treasurer...

#### OFFERING:

- A. Let us worship God with our morning offering, always remembering the word of Jesus that

"It is more blessed to give than  
it is to receive...."