

2025 05 04 – *Tend My Sheep*

Scripture: John 21:1-19 (*The Inclusive Bible*)

Jesus had been dead for a few weeks. According to the Gospel of John, the disciples had seen his risen form on that first Easter Sunday and then again on the eighth day. Both of these appearances had taken place in a locked room in the city of Jerusalem. But now, a few weeks later, at least some of Jesus' followers had returned to their homes in Galilee. Simon Peter, the sons of Zebedee, Nathaniel, Thomas and two other disciples were together on the shore of Lake Tiberius, also known as the Sea of Galilee.

It's not surprising that they would choose to go fishing. This was, of course, the occupation that Simon and his brother Andrew, and James and John, the sons of Zebedee left in order to follow Jesus. Today's story tells us that all through the night they caught nothing. But just after daybreak, with the Risen Christ's help, they are able to bring in a huge catch. When they return to shore, their Rabbi, their teacher, this risen Christ, whose form they don't really recognize, invites them to join him in a meal of bread and freshly grilled fish.

Today I want to focus on what happened after the meal. When Jesus spoke directly to Simon Peter asking, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was, of course, the disciple who, on the night before Jesus died, told the authorities that he wasn't one of Jesus' disciples. In fact, he denied his association with Jesus three separate times on that fateful night.

So it's not surprising that Jesus asks his question three times and gives Peter three opportunities to acknowledge his love, his loyalty and his friendship. It is a moment of healing and forgiveness for Peter, but it is more than that. It also a moment of call and even ordination as Jesus tells Peter to feed and to tend his sheep.

We all know that Jesus didn't have any woolly animals for Peter to tend. He was asking Peter to take a leadership position amongst his disciples. He was asking Peter to tend, to care for, all of his followers. And even beyond that, he was asking Peter to tend and to care for all people, just as Jesus himself had cared for, had compassion for, everyone, including the poor, the vulnerable and the marginalized.

Tend my sheep. As individuals and as a church we are also called to care for each other and for all people. It's easy to say, but it's not as easy to live out this call for compassion and care in our community and in our world.

This difficulty is certainly highlighted on this Red Dress Sunday. On this day we are honouring and bringing awareness to the thousands of Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people who have been subject to disproportionate violence in Canada. We are remembering those who are missing or murdered. We are remembering their families, their loved ones. We are bringing awareness to times in our country when we as a society have not been tending to the God's people, to God's sheep.

This year one of the stories that has been front and centre in our news is the successful search of the Prairie Green landfill site near Winnipeg, Manitoba. It was a search for the bodies of Mercedes Myran and Morgan Harris. These Indigenous women were murdered in the spring of 2022, their killer was charged in December of that same year and it was known at that time that their bodies had been dumped at Prairie Green. But the search for their bodies didn't begin until nearly two years later, in October 2024 and it was in March of this year that their bodies were finally identified.

As I was thinking about today's theme, I wondered. I wondered what are the reasons that we sometimes find it hard to tend God's sheep, to care for all of God's people, all of God's creation? This recent news story seemed like a perfect example. Why did it take so long to begin this search? Why didn't it start back in December of 2022?

Well, with a little research on the Internet, I was able to determine that the first reason given was the danger that would be faced by those doing the search—the possibility of disturbing hazardous material such as asbestos. Later, after a feasibility study had been done, the government argued that the cost would be too high and that the process could take too long. It took a new government to be elected in Manitoba before anything happened. <https://indiginews.com/features/how-the-winnipeg-landfill-search-came-to-be-a-timeline>

It is easy to come up with excuses when we are called to care for our neighbours, especially when our neighbours are far away or when they are from a different

race or nation. When the Manitoba government refused to search the landfill many questioned whether the same decision would have been made if the murdered women had been white, rather than Indigenous.

Jesus didn't put any limitations on his instructions to Simon Peter. He just said, "Feed my lambs," "Tend my sheep." Jesus even went on to warn Peter that sometimes he would be forced to go where he "didn't want to go." He warned Peter of the danger of following in his footsteps.

Following Jesus has never been an easy task. Sometimes it requires us to go places that make us feel uncomfortable, to do things we've never done before, to start projects that, in the beginning, seem undoable. Many of us, when we consider the issues around Red Dress Day hear the word "thousands" and feel overwhelmed before we even start.

But there are things that we, as individuals, and as a church can do. One of the easiest is to offer our resources, financial and otherwise to those who are spreading awareness about this issue. In fact, this year our Affirming Ministry Group has given \$250 from their budget to support the work of the SW Red Dress Committee and their Red Dress Day Event. And, you may have noticed that the event has been advertised on our website and Facebook page.

Which leads us to the second action and that is listening to Indigenous people and showing up for them. This means seeking out organizations and places where you can hear the stories of Indigenous people. Attending events such as

local Pow Wows, book readings, the current display at our local museum about the Metis Residential Schools and, of course, the Red Dress Day Event that is happening at 2 o'clock this afternoon at the Living Sky Casino. Last weekend my sister and I visited Wanuskewin, a heritage centre just outside Saskatoon where visitors have many opportunities to learn about the long history of the Indigenous peoples of this province.

In 2019, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls released its final report. This report includes 231 individual calls for justice that are directed at governments, institutions (including the church), social service providers, industries and all Canadians. Tending Jesus' sheep means reading and sharing the information in this report. It means holding ourselves and our municipal, provincial and federal leaders to account.

<https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/beyond-red-dress-day-7-calls-to-action-for-indigenous-allies/>

Finally, I want to say that our Indigenous neighbours are not looking for someone to "save" them. They are looking for allies, for people who will stand in solidarity with them. In this instance, tending God's sheep means being willing to go that extra mile and maybe even get a little uncomfortable in order to work with our Indigenous neighbours to stop the disproportionate violence that is still happening to Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people in our country. May we heed God's call, may we tend God's sheep.

May it be so. Amen.