Sermon: “Keeping the Flock Healthy” – based on John 21:1-19

In the musical, Fiddler on the Roof, one of the favorite songs occurs between Tevye and Golde, his wife of 25 years, while thinking of the engagement of their daughter, Hodel to young Perchik.

"He’s a good man, Golde. I like him. And what’s more important, Hodel likes him. Hodel loves him. So what can we do? It’s a new world... A new world. Love. “Golde...Do you love me?”

(Golde) “Do I what?” (Tevye) “Do you love me?”

(Golde) “Do I love you? With our daughters getting married and this trouble in the town, you’re upset, you’re worn out. Go inside, go lie down! Maybe it’s indigestion.”

(Tevye) “Golde, I'm asking you a question... Do you love me?”

(Golde) “You’re a fool. (Tevye) “I know... But do you love me?”

(Golde) “Do I love you? For twenty-five years I've washed your clothes, cooked your meals, cleaned your house, given you children, milked the cow... after twenty-five years, why talk about love right now?”

(Golde) “I'm your wife.” (Tevye) “I know...But do you love me?”

(Golde) “Do I love him? For twenty-five years I've lived with him, fought with him, starved with him twenty-five years my bed is his. If that's not love, what is?”

(Tevye) “Then you love me?” (Golde) “I suppose I do.”

(Tevye) “And I suppose I love you too. It doesn’t change a thing. But even so, after twenty-five years, it’s nice to know.”

The Resurrected Jesus asks his loyal, if sometimes fearful, disciple, Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Like Tevye, he asks Simon multiple times. “Do you love me?” [Jesus, knows we are listening.] Each time he gives Simon Peter a charge – a command – an assignment as proof of that devotion. In order, three times, Jesus says, “Feed my lambs,” “Tend my sheep,” “Feed my sheep.”

Who are the sheep? Are we the sheep? Who is the Shepherd? Well, Jesus, of course, the Good Shepherd, el Pastore Buenos. So what is Simon’s role? What are the roles of the disciples? I will give you a hint. Look at the picture of the sheep on your bulletin cover. What do you see?

Amy and I missed this the first time we were looking at it. Notice the sheep are not standing still. They are running towards you. And who/what is chasing them in the background? The sheep dog. The sheep dog is keeping the flock together and moving them towards home.

I think I am more of a sheep dog, than a shepherd. Just chasing the sheep home to God, the Good Shepherd.
I have been thinking about what Jesus asked Simon and the rest of us, as disciples to do, as a way of showing our love for him. Earlier in John 13, Jesus says, “Just as I have loved you, you should also love one another. By this everyone will know you are my disciples, if you have one for one another.”

How do we show our love for Jesus? By tending and feeding the flock. We have to take care of one another, and of course, first, we have to take good care of ourselves.

This is Health Awareness Sunday says my Presbyterian planning calendar. Let’s talk about our health. “Physician, heal thyself,” I believe Jesus said. Found some good quotes on health, some printed today.

“The part can never be well unless the whole is well.” Plato

“Our prayers should be for a sound mind in a healthy body.” Juvenal

“Health is a sacred process. Food is not something you pull off the shelf –it has a life force to it.” Dr. Mehmet Oz, AARP the Magazine, May/June 2010

Are you taking care of your body? Getting enough sleep? Getting any or enough exercise? Eating healthy? Receiving good medical care? Avoiding abuse of harmful substances alcohol, nicotine, etc?

An article in Sunday’s Enquirer, Associated Press “Walking reduces risk of stroke” in women. Walk at least 2 hours a week, lowers risk in women 30% and blood pressure and weight loss. Dr. Oz says start with 30” of walking a day, then after a month, add aerobic activity, steps, strength training, balance work, yoga. This was in AARP magazine, read principally by those 50 and over. Anybody want to meet me in the Bright Meadows Park for a lap or two?

Another article I found this week was in our own Presbyterians Today magazine, April issue. “Nursing Comes to Church – parish nurses tend to the whole person.” It’s about parish nurse ministry. Nurse Pat McGlade of the Westside Presbyterian Church in Ridgewood, N.J. says, “It’s a whole ministry of presence, to listen and be there for people.” “My job is to let people in the congregation know the church is there…” “We’re basically here to deliver Jesus’ love,” McGlade says, “He’s the ultimate model – always concerned about the health of the body, helping to heal people. He wants us to be a physically, mentally and spiritually healthy congregation.”

[to see this whole article on parish nursing in the Presbyterian Church go to http://www.pcusa.org/today/cover.htm]

Now we have a couple of good nurses in our parish, both are pretty busy with career or family needs, but I bet we could get some consultation on how we could help each other more. The Deacons are certainly trying to help through a ministry of concern and contact. A lot of it is about listening. And some of it is listening to ourselves. What do I hear or see? Coughing, belt too tight, can’t reach over to tie my shoes?

Then there is health care. I don’t know if you have heard, but some, including the President, say we need health care reform. In fact, it has been a popular topic of conversation for some years. Now, we may not agree on what we need – but real change is needed. Should every citizen have access to reasonable cost effective adequate health care services? I think so. And I think Jesus
would think so. Tend my sheep. We all want healthy sheep don’t we? The body is a temple, says scripture. It also says, we are the body of Christ. Are we going to let him die again?

Last, I get lots of notices of events from the Dearborn County Hospital, from Mary Wernke, in the community relations office. You know it really is a fine hospital. They can’t do everything the big boys can, but they do show real compassion for their county. Recent examples, Health-a-fair at Miami Center in Cleves; Hospice Golf Tournament at Hidden Valley Golf Club, May 10th; Better Breathers Club for any adult with a lung condition; Free smoking cessation classes, grief counseling groups; in addition to acute and outpatient care. And the Community Mental Health center is next door. Mental health needs tending too. And this is Child Abuse Awareness month. When you see it, report it, it’s the law, and it’s what Jesus would do.

“I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul.” (3 John 1:2 NRSV) Alleluia! Amen.