A few years ago, I spent a summer serving as the Director of the Summer Children’s Program at my home church in Chinatown. I was in charge of overseeing 74 children from 1st to 6th grade with about 10 staff and volunteers. This is the same program that Joseph and Philip have worked in the past couple of years also. For those of you who have ever worked with children, I’m sure, you know how stressful that can be. There was never a dull moment in the building, from the first kid who arrives to the last kid who leaves.

Whenever we go outside all the teachers need to be extra vigilant in keeping our eyes on the children. There’s always a possibility that one of them might get lost or be left behind in the park or on the subway train….but thankfully that has never happened before. When we go out for field trip, we made them wear the same colored T-shirts in order to identify themselves from the kids of the other programs. It’s like the shepherds walking with a bunch of sheep trailing behind making sure that they stay within the pen and not stray away, or being attacked by the enemies.

The relationship between the shepherd and his flock is not unfamiliar as described in numerous places throughout the Bible, especially in the Old Testament. Jesus used the parable of the Lost Sheep to describe how the shepherd would do anything to search for that one lost sheep, even though he still had the other 99. The bond between the shepherd and the sheep is an intimate and an inseparable one, as they communicate to one another’s voices and commands. The sheep must stay within the constant vigilant watch of the shepherd and the sheep trust the shepherd’s leadership and guidance. As Jesus used this analogy to describe God’s relationships with us that he is willing to go out of his way and rescue that one lost soul….even to the point of sending God’s only beloved Son as the sacrificial lamb.

Jesus said, ***“I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep.”[[1]](#footnote-1)***The good shepherd and the sheep recognize each other and find their belonging with one another. The shepherd’s voice provided a sense of comfort and security and the sheep were willing to follow and obey the shepherd’s direction.

Incidentally, the term “Good” in Greek “kalos”, doesn’t necessarily mean the opposite of “Bad” or “Evil”. It really should’ve been translated as “***ideal, model, noble, competent, faithful and praiseworthy***”. The “noble and model” shepherd is someone whom we can trust for his leadership, guidance, protection and care.

In the passage that we just read from the Gospel of John, we saw how we are like the sheep being embraced and protected by the Great Shepherd. However, we must dig a little deeper beyond the surface and read it from a more broader perspective. What about our relationship with the other sheep that are out there as well, not just amongst those who are already in the same sheep pen. It’s not just about OUR relationship with OUR shepherd. There are other sheep out there as well who are looking in from the outside. Our relationship with other sheep matters as much as our relationship with our own Great Shepherd.

**Out of the passage that we read this morning, Jesus unveiled to us a whole new perspective of what God’s kingdom may look like and what it means for us to be in relation with others.**

In verse 16, Jesus clearly reminded us that we are NOT the only sheep around. Jesus said, **“*I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.”[[2]](#footnote-2)*** These “other” sheep are also being called and are given the same opportunity to respond to the same command. The LORD provides for them the equal opportunity to breathe the same air and eat the same grass.

Unboubtedly, this was a particular challenge not only for the early church then, but for us today also. The early church had to deal with all kinds of believers with Jews and Gentiles from various degree of devotions.

This challenge of welcoming and providing hospitality to ALL reminds us that **the foundation of our faith and the church solely rests on Christ alone.** He is still the head of the body and our faith must be anchored upon his death and his resurrection. Jesus was the Great Shepherd who was willing to lay down his life for his sheep and BECAME the sacrificial lamb himself for ALL, and not just for you and me. As one theologian pointed out, ***Jesus did not exclude people based on the standards of the day – status, lineage, or physical conditions.[[3]](#footnote-3)***

As we are transitioning from the post-resurrection season into the Pentecostal season in the coming weeks, we shift our liturgical focus towards the life of the early church community. We see how the early church must go out of their way and their comfort zone in order to cope with one another’s differences. They were willing to share what they had in common through their faith in God and trust in one another.

In his letter to the early church in Galatia, the Apostle Paul challenged the church to rethink who we are as a household of God’s people – a called community of faith. Paul wrote ***“in Christ Jesus we are all children of God through faith. As many of us as were baptized into Christ have clothed ourselves with Christ, there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of we are [all] one in Christ Jesus. And if we belong to Christ, then we are Abraham's offspring, [children] according to the promise.[[4]](#footnote-4)***

By Christ’s sacrificial giving of himself, he has made **EVERY one** and **ANY one** who hear his command to be as **One people** – under One Faith, One Lord, and One Baptism. **Christ is our common denominator of the body that is indivisible in spite of our human differences.**

In recent years, our denomination – the Presbyterian Church (USA) has adopted a series of confession of faith, such as the *Confession of Belhar* and churchwide policies that address how we ought to relate to one another as sheep under the Great Shepherd. We are all called to be in obedience to the common calling of our great shepherd, whether one is black or white, or any shades of grey in between. **All sheep’s lives matter, as well as the people’s, whether you’re the 1 that is lost or the other 99.**

Collectively as the church, the Presbyterian Church confesses that we have neglected over the years and have failed to do our due diligence in promoting the peace, unity and purity of the church in our practices of faith and witnesses to our communities. We have failed to bring God’s Kingdom one step closer to reality while we focused on our self-serving interests while neglecting the needs of others. We recognize that there is enormous amount of works ahead of us to eradicate this sin and the evil of racism in this world, and that the adoption of these confessions and pollicies would alter the way not only the way we see or relate to one another as God’s sheep, but the way we see God’s kingdom come to fruition one day, on earth as it is in heaven. However, the real challenge for us is to bring about practical change in our attitudes and transformation of our hearts in our relationship with one another.

Furthermore, in the upcoming *General Assembly* to be held in June in St. Louis, which I will be attending, our denominational body - the Presbyterian Church (USA) will prayerfully explore, discern, debate, and ultimately vote upon a number of proposals on how we can be faithful and obedient sheep under the leading of the shepherd and the Holy Spirit. One of the overtures that the Assembly will debate upon is how we may restructure the existing system of how we do things in the past and present, especially when things are not working out as they should. Our times and society have changed…but God’s commission for us and our mission remains the same.

This invites us to open a whole new conversation concerning how we can seek new ways of relating to one another not only in **equality** and **equity** but also **fairness** and **justice** for ALL people, both in and around the community of faith. We pray that through this upcoming Assembly that the Holy Spirit will lead our churches into new ways of relationship and partnership with one another in mission, as demonstrated by Christ hands-on and through his teachings.

Christ has laid down His life for His sheep. His work has completed and we have been empowered and commissioned to carry on God’s mission to ALL of God’s sheep, including those who are looking in from the outside or those who might have wandered off and are now lost. These sheep need to be found and be guided back into the sheep pen. They need to be fed and nourished. As Christ uttered to his disciples in one of his last words while dying on the cross “*Feed My Lambs! Tend My Sheep! Feed My Sheep*!”[[5]](#footnote-5)

As one theologian put it, God has offered us the gift of compassion to tend the sheep, to care for those who are lonely and hurting, to provide spiritual food for all of God’s sheep, from the youngest to the oldest, in continual action to nourish and care for their souls, bringing them into the fullness of spiritual maturity. [[6]](#footnote-6)

The work of rescuing and saving the lost sheep ultimately belongs to God – we are only the “**temporary shepherd**” of God’s mission. The community that Christ envisioned for us is an inclusive and welcoming one. It celebrates our diversity as a gift from God rather than barriers that divide us and differentiate us. It’s OK that we can call each other as “BEST FRIENDS” treating each other with mutual respect and love.

Shepherds of God, Christ has laid himself as the cornerstone of our faith. He has offered a new command for us to “lay down our lives for the sheep” and imposed this new challenge for us today, as witnesses of God’s love for humanity. So let us go and do as Christ commanded us **“*Feed My Lambs! Tend My Sheep! Feed My Sheep*!**

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *John 10:14-15* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. John 10:16 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Essex Barbar J. *Feasting on the Word Year B, Volume 2, p.453* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Galatians 3:26-29* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *John 21:15-17* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. http://www.gotquestions.org/feed-my-sheep.html [↑](#footnote-ref-6)