

Tend My Sheep, May 4, 2025

It's good to be back, and thank you so much for the luxury of a full week off after Easter.

If you asked me how it went already, I probably said it was great, and so necessary.

I'd love to tell you about all of the amazing things that I did, and got caught up on, but in reality, I did very little

.Like, shockingly, embarrassingly little.

I changed the oil and fuel filters on a sailboat.

I made an appointment to get my car tires switched over, and didn't take care of it until just last Monday...my normal day off.

I cleaned up half of the mess in our basement, and glued together two pieces of a remote control airplane kit that has been taking up space in our house for the past 6 years.

To be honest, I don't even care about building a remote control airplane, but I felt bad that it had been sitting in my parent's basement since I said I'd love to build it at age 12, so I decided to start it up again as an adult, with similar results to the first time around.

I went for a walk with my dog. On my own road. Once.

In my mind, by the end of a week off, our house would be spotless, I'd be completely caught up in all of my Ministry 21 class work, I'd have the next month of church planned out, the sailboat, always in need of care would be scrubbed inside and out and ready to go, and if I really got my act together, I might also get a head start on writing Lyndon Institute's Federal Perkins plan for next year - the last remaining major task of my previous work life.

I didn't plan on reading, praying and yes, even spending too much time on the one phone game that really helps me focus, but that's what I did.

I didn't plan on wandering around our land not for physical fitness, but for the sake of clearing my head, but that's also what I did.

I didn't plan on sitting by Lake Champlain, being boat-unproductive, simply watching the water, but that's what I did.

I also didn't plan on budgeting time and energy to stand with Marilla during a challenging time in her own work life, nor spending a full day at the statehouse protesting the incarceration of Mohsen Madawi,

but that's exactly what I did,
and both of those last two things were crucial.
Show your love by tending my sheep, Jesus says,
not "by building the best fishing boat you can".

When are we going to realize sometimes, what we do is enough?

Observing Holy Week followed by celebrating Easter is tough, as a first year minister training on the job. Doing it after being here for the last 39 Sundays, a streak broken only by an overnight confirmation retreat is also tough.

Wonderful, but intense.

And first world problems here... if I think that's hard,
imagine being a disciple during Holy Week.

They gave up their lives, nearly immediately, to follow in the path of light and justice.

They entered Jerusalem on an emotional high, with the potential consequences of speaking truth to oppressive power no doubt on their hearts and minds.

They watched the population change from embracing to condemning their movement,
they experienced a passover meal like no other,
an intense night in the garden of Gethsemane,
their leader and king was executed,

and now...now, they were shown the reality of resurrection. .

For their humanity, history would come to know them as betrayers, deniers, followers who just didn't do enough.

As biblical scholar David Bartlett points out, the human spirit can only take so much.

It's only natural that they might have gone back to doing what they knew best, and could accomplish with minimal additional stress,

something like fishing.

And I believe we've all been there.

After major life events, we retreat to what we know to be familiar and find that it can be anything but.

We expect ourselves to jump right back in, but something's missing, and in this moment, when the most familiar experience just wasn't working out, Jesus appeared on the shore. He didn't appear to chastise them for forgetting how to fish.

He showed up to cook them a meal.

God, Emmanuel, showed up to take care of them.

When they had nothing left, when they were relegated to a life without Christ, he returned in resurrected form, pointed them in the right direction, and served them.

We worship a God who reminds us that self-care matters.

We're not talking about the buzz word, bubble bath and chocolate cake version of self-care,

we're talking about granting and demanding time and space to sit with our God, be fed and nourished, and leave as different people than how we started.

Jewish author and blogger Naomie Rubner puts it this way:

We invest and invest and invest in self-care, wondering why we still feel sad, low, or burned-out, without realizing that in fact this self-care is an avoiding tactic.

Because we don't take responsibility for our very own lives.

Know this: Life isn't passive. Life is active.

Hashem (Hebrew for "the name") adores you, and wants you to engage in a relationship with Him, hold her hand, and co create your most inspired, most fulfilling life together.

Can you recognize that you're worthy of love and worthy of being taken care of just because you are a neshamah, (the term meaning holy creation of soul that's reserved specifically for people)?

What is asked in return? Simply pay it forward.

Jesus asks Peter three times, "Do you love me?", recalling the three times Peter denied him, and each time, the proof of love was simple.

Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep.

The message here is so simple, yet so easy to miss when the weight of the world is on our shoulders. When we expect perfection from ourselves, only to find empty nets. Stop fishing.

Turn to the shore, allow space for God in our lives, and magnify the love we receive through service to others.

Tend my sheep.

Today, let's put it into practice. Go forward, caring for the world that exists right in front of you.

Recognize just how worthy you are of God's love, and give thanks by magnifying that love through the care you give to others.

Know that when you are weary, rest.

When your feet stumble, and your hands can no longer function, permit yourself to stop.

Look to the shore, be fed with God's love.

Accept, beloved soul, that you are enough.

And then Go feed God's sheep.

Amen.