**May 5, 2019**

**John 21:1-19**

Jesus died. Christ is risen! Alleluia! and all that good news! But now Jesus isn’t with the disciples, taking them from town to town. Now he isn’t teaching or praying with them every day. Now they’re on their own. So what did they do? They went back home. (sigh) They returned to their fishing boats. Even after seeing the risen Christ, even after doubting and believing – when they left their safe room, they went back home. They probably didn’t know where to go, so they went home. They didn’t know what to do, so they went back to their old jobs.

I know that feeling. When you don’t know what else to do or where else to go, go home. Even if (maybe especially if) I can’t be there in person, my heart sings homesongs/heartsongs which have become home for me in the passing years. When life is wonderful and when life is hard, on the best and most difficult days, these are the songs I sing to myself. Last night the Abington choir sang a song which I learned in youth choir and haven’t heard since then. As soon as the introduction began, I was transported home. Feeling both thankful and longing for those days, but feeling even more grateful for times when those heartsongs come into my present day, connecting *that* home with this home.

Another one of the anthems I learned as a child was actually a setting of Jesus’ conversation with Peter here: “Feed my lambs, tend my sheep, over all a vigil keep. In my name, lead them forth gently as a shepherd.” [[1]](#footnote-1) My children’s and youth choir director himself was a gentle leader. He shepherded us between growing friendships, musical training, and Christian discipleship. No matter how bad our behavior was in rehearsal, or how slow the learning of our music, at the end of every rehearsal and before every worship service, we prayed together. We prayed the same prayer together. Each week. It was memorized and said with some amount of boredom and eye rolling as a teenager, but the words have become quite important to me today:

Bless O Lord, us thy servants who minister in thy temple.

Grant that what we sing with our lips we may believe in our hearts,

and what we believe in our hearts we may show forth in our lives. [[2]](#footnote-2)

This prayer moved our choral efforts – the ministering in God’s temple through bumbling processions, introits and anthem – from just a song in church to a promise of discipleship. “Grant that what we sing with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and what we believe in our hearts we may show forth in our lives.” Let these notes not *just* resound in this Sanctuary, but let these notes carry us into the world. Let these songs not *just* be for organ and stained glass, but let these melodies seep into our hearts to soar on their own. Let these words not *just* stay on the page, but let them become our hope, our faith, our life.

That seems to be the story within today’s Gospel lesson. The disciples (who had been ministering with Jesus – in and out of the temple; who had been singing and sharing and showing) did not let Christ’s Loving, Servant, Good News songs seep into their lives. What Jesus taught them did not become their heartsongs. The words stayed on the page, not in their hearts. The notes didn’t carry them out into the world. But Jesus, full of compassion, found them (once again) and called them back into fellowship with him. Jesus told Peter, “Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. And follow me.”… Peter, Peter… you ministered with me in the temple. You have followed and served me in the world. Now don’t keep it to yourself. What you sing with your lips, believe in your heart. What you believe in your heart, show forth in your life. Don’t let these years just be happy memories for your scrapbook, but let this time carry you out into the world. Let the things you’ve learned not *just* be intellectual or experiential, but let them root deep into your heart. Let the love we’ve shared not just stop here, but grow and flourish. Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. And follow me.

Jesus moved Peter from just ministering in the temple, just going through the motions on Sunday, to a way of being that others would see and take note.

For us, our simple ministering in the temple becomes proclamation when “Amazing Grace” isn’t just “a sweet sound”, but an overwhelming reminder of God’s goodness after you’ve know the pain of being lost and the joy of being found, and you let others see that joy... Our heartsong becomes a lifesong when we testify that God is our best thought by day or by night. When we do *love* to tell the story of unseen things above.

Jesus called the disciples into a sacred time and space to learn and love and see God’s glory. Then altogether too quickly sent them out to show and tell and share God’s glory. So it is with us. We are not meant to stay in the Sanctuary, ministering in peace and quiet. We are meant to go and love and serve. Feed God’s people. Tend to God’s people. And follow Christ. Don’t let today’s worship stay here, but take it out to lunch. Hum a melody this afternoon. Ponder the magnitude of God’s love. Share a word, a song, a meal with the hungry. And then listen for what God has to say to you tomorrow.

“O Lord, grant that what we sing with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and what we believe in our hearts we may show forth in our lives.” Amen.

1. Natalie Sleeth children’s anthem [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. RSCM chorister’s prayer [↑](#footnote-ref-2)