

## **Feed My Sheep**

Creation Care Sunday 2020 Sermon Starter

*Written by the Rev. Mitchell C. Hescox and the Rev. Kyle Meyaard-Schaap*

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**John 21:15-17 (NIV)**

***<sup>15</sup> When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”***

***“Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.”***

***Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”***

***<sup>16</sup> Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”***

***He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”***

***Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”***

***<sup>17</sup> The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”***

***Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”***

***Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.***

While many in the United States will shortly be celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Earth Day, every Sunday Christians celebrate the ultimate Earth Day, the 1<sup>st</sup> Day of New Creation. Given for most Christians, the connection between Earth Day and the First Day of the New Creation might be obscure, it's high time we make the connection. What better way than over breakfast with Jesus and his disciples a few short days after Easter?

My thoughts today center on one of the most central messages of Scripture – a very common thread contained throughout the entire Bible – of caring for people, especially those who are the most at risk, whether it's here in South Central Pennsylvania (*[insert your locality here](#)*) or around the world. The psalmist captures it perfectly:

***Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy. (Psalm 82:3-4 NIV)***

And so did Jesus shortly before his death: ***“Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me”*** (Matthew 25:40 (NIV)). God commands us to care for people in need, in trouble and those hurting.

What I'm really talking about today is love. Living God's love and sharing God's love is my most important story. In fact, the refrain from the old hymn by Kate Hankey (***Kate Hankey was strongly influenced by William Wilberforce living a life of service for the poor and those***

**in poor health)** and William G. Fischer tells my calling to ministry: **(Please sing it you are so gifted and if appropriate invite the congregation to sing as well.)**

I love to tell the story  
'Twill be my theme in glory  
To tell the old, old story  
Of Jesus and his love

It's impossible to tell of Jesus and his love, if we don't live love. Each day Jesus asks me, Mitch **(insert your name)** just as he asked Peter, "Do you love me?" And how can we respond yes if we don't love what God loves, what God created, what God owns?

### **Colossians 1:15-16 (NIV)**

***<sup>15</sup> The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. <sup>16</sup> For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.***

Somehow, so many believe that the earth was created for us. A careful reading of Scripture, however, won't let us go there. The earth is not ours; it is the Lord's (Ps. 24). It is not ours to pillage, consume, abuse, and literally dominate as we see fit. The earth was created by and for Jesus. Leviticus, Isaiah, the Psalms, and throughout the entire Bible, we are reminded that God created the world and that God alone retains ownership. We are but tenants of a wonderful creation offered to us as a beautiful, flourishing garden supporting abundant life for all, if only we live as faithful caretakers of it. The Rev. Billy Graham said it best:

***Why should we be concerned about the environment? It isn't just because of the dangers we face from pollution, climate change, or other environmental problems—although these are serious. For Christians, the issue is much deeper: We know that God created the world, and it belongs to Him, not us. Because of this, we are only stewards or trustees of God's creation, and we aren't to abuse or neglect it. The Bible says, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it" (Psalm 24:1). The Rev. Dr. Billy Graham, April 2017***

How can we say we love God when we emit over 100 toxic chemicals into the air every day as a direct result of our addiction to fossil fuel-generated power? Polyaromatic hydrocarbons; heavy metals like arsenic, lead, and mercury; carcinogens like benzene; fine particles that are all inhaled and that harm vital organs including the heart, lungs, and brain. Carbon pollution that's directly warming our planet and changing God's good design for the climate. Through the use of fossil fuels, plastics and many petrochemicals, we are literally changing our DNA—the very DNA that God so lovingly knit together in our mother's womb (Ps. 139). The result? Asthma, Autism, ADHD, and Allergies impacting 1 in 3 children in the US. Increased likelihood of various

cancers, especially breast cancer in women. Lowered fertility rates in both men and women. In other words: God's sheep are in trouble.

**[Please feel free to shorten this section and highlight the most important health concerns of your congregation]**

How can we say we love God and care for His children when here in central Pennsylvania **(insert your local children's health statistics)**, according to [American Lung Association State of the Air Report 2019](#), York, Lancaster, Harrisburg, and York are among the 25 dirtiest air communities in the country! All three have worse air than either Pittsburgh or Philadelphia. Today, more than 36,000 children in our area suffer asthma along with 945,000 adults throughout Pennsylvania. The increasing smog will result in tens of thousands of additional asthma attacks each year. In addition, a recent medical study by researchers at Carnegie-Mellon adds to the mounting evidence that natural gas pollution is also one of the leading sources for increased soot (PM<sub>2.5</sub>) in our air. Soot already results in over 16,000 preterm births in the United States, causing over 5,000 infant deaths and is a leading cause of cardiac and respiratory diseases resulting in approximately 108,000 deaths. 43% of Americans live in areas of harmful air pollution and only a couple years before it was approximately 39%. Our air is getting worse and that's completely unacceptable to God and should be to us.

Unfortunately for Pennsylvania it only gets worst. According to a 2018 peer reviewed study, the natural gas industry, through both non-conventional (fracking) and the conventional approaches, emits five times as much methane and nine times more volatile organic compounds (VOC's) than they have reported to the Commonwealth. Methane and the other associated toxins that leak from our natural gas industry are double trouble. Over 90 % of at least 150 peer reviewed medical studies confirm that those living in proximity to natural gas production sites are especially threatened: premature and low birthweight babies, birth defects, respiratory illnesses, and other serious health consequences. And for the rest of us living throughout Pennsylvania, linking methane and associated VOC's result in increased smog (ground level ozone) and increased temperatures – all influencing our changing climate and exacerbating asthma attacks, Lyme Disease, and the potential for more heat related deaths.

We're already threatening ours and our children's health and lives **right here right now**, and it will only get worse. Especially as the world continues to heat-up. For some, climate change remains a divisive issue. However, for the people of the world – it's a catastrophe. Climate change forces one person to be displaced every two seconds due to massive decreases in food production and increased water scarcity. What's more, over 4,000 deaths occur each day from fossil fuel-related air pollution in China alone. Around the world, over 9 million people die from this pollution each year. That's 3X more than tuberculosis, malaria and AIDS combined and 10X more than any acts of war or violence.

Climate change is the greatest moral challenge of our time, as every one of God's children across the earth is impacted. If we, Jesus followers, get our act together and truly follow Jesus, then there is hope. Because with Jesus, we are neither helpless nor hopeless.

And it begins with love, God's love. ***For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*** – John 3:16. Because God first loved us, our lives are filled with gratitude (1 John 4:19). Because God's love in our hearts must be shared — by its very nature it cannot be hoarded but must be given back to God and to others — we have all we need to become who God created us to be: creatures who freely fulfill the Great Commandment to love God, others, and ourselves.

Our response to the love that begins with God is to love back. We were saved by God's grace not to sit around and wait to get our ticket punched for heaven but to do the works set before us. Ephesians 2:8-10 makes this perfectly plain: <sup>8</sup> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— <sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are God's handiwork, **created in Christ Jesus to do good works**, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

And the greatest good work for us at this moment in time is for care for Jesus' sheep – including the most vulnerable among us: our kids, God kids – here at home, across the United States, and around the world. We're changing who we are, and many of the same pollutants threatening our kids have also created a carbon blanket that's 1.5 times thicker than God designed it to be, resulting in a warming world, threatening people's lives. Forget about language like "save the earth". Don't worry about the earth – it will adapt. We address the causes and effects of climate change now in order to minimize the harm threatening the very ones God commands us to care for. the very flock Jesus grills Peter over.

***The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep.***

It's time for us to respond like Peter. Major efforts on climate change should have begun 10 years ago. We have now blown past our margin of safety. Strong action this decade is essential to avoid even more dangerous and destabilizing interference with the climate system than is already baked into it as we speak, threatening the lives of billions. We are already facing grave consequences like more extreme weather, rising sea-levels, increased heat waves, and heightened health threats. Our inaction will only threaten more and more children of God until we act.

It's time to care for Jesus' sheep and it begins with each of us. Our response starts in prayer. We all need to ask for forgiveness and the wisdom to know how best to use our gifts to follow Jesus' lead in the Kingdom ends of justice, peace, and security for all. Pray daily for God to strengthen and guide you and fill you with His love, and to do the same for all those in the climate movement, the scientists and engineers working to create solutions, our elected officials, and business leaders.

Then keep praying for the strength to commit to caring for all God's children and for His creation, that it might once again be the flourishing garden it was intended to be. Pray that your heart might be formed ever more after God's heart as you live as a creation steward at home, at church, and in the community. And then act. As Christians, we believe our actions form us into certain kinds of people. So if we want to be creation stewards, we better start acting like it. Here are a few things you can consider:

1. Start a creation care team and promote the biblical command for earth stewardship:
  - a. Help your facilities and home to become energy efficient, save money and use the excess funds to provide clean energy in the majority world.
  - b. Research buying, installing, or developing renewable energy.
  - c. Start a community garden, plant trees, and work with your community to do the same.
  - d. Buy local and in season foods, reducing transportation costs.
  - e. Prepare your facilities as safe havens during the increasing frequency of heat waves and other extreme weather.
  - f. Use public transportation and drive the most energy efficient vehicle that meets your family's needs.
2. Make a commitment to God that following Jesus in working to overcome climate change will be a top priority in your life.
3. Join with other Christians in working to overcome climate change. Create or join a climate action support group. To keep updated and engaged, join the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN), and if you are 30 and under, Young Evangelicals for Climate Action.
4. Help to grow the Christian Climate Movement. Talk with family and friends about the importance of climate action. Encourage them everyone to join together you follow Jesus in defending our children's health and living life that finds solutions for the climate crisis..

Caring for God's creation and acting on climate change isn't a political issue. It is an act of discipleship. It is simply part of what it means to follow Jesus in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Thanks to Jesus, we are not hopeless or helpless. Now is the time to say yes to Jesus and to care for His children and His creation.

***Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."  
Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."***

## **JESU, JESU, FILL US WITH YOUR LOVE**

**BY TOM COLVIN**

*Refrain:*

Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love,  
show us how to serve the neighbors we have from you.

Kneels at the feet of his friends,  
silently washes their feet,  
Master who acts as a slave to them.

*Refrain*

Neighbors are wealthy and poor,  
varied in color and race,  
neighbors are near us and far away.

*Refrain*

These are the ones we should serve,  
these are the ones we should love,  
all these are neighbors to us and you.

*Refrain*

Loving puts us on our knees,  
silently washing their feet,  
this is the way we should live with you.

*Refrain*