

Take Care of One Another

April 18, 2010, 3rd Sunday of Easter, John 21:1-19

The message is the same as every other Bible story but this time there are messengers and a special location. The messengers are almost everyone who appears in the Christian Bible: Jesus, Peter, James, John, Andrew, even fish and bread and a Jewish BBQ grill. The location of the story is not Temple or Synagogue, but an ordinary work place on an ordinary work day on the Sea of Galilee on a fishing boat. Jesus tells us again and again that we human beings are made in the image and likeness of God, of every color, nation and language, male and female, young or old, *“We are Family; Love One Another, Feed the Lambs, Take care of the Sheep.”* The message of Jesus Christ is very simple, “If you want to be my Follower, a Christian, then you will take care of those who cannot take care of themselves. Jesus does not say that we are to take care of other Christians, but no Moslems, or people of color, or only Americans, or only those who deserve to be taken care of. We are to take care of the little babies, unborn and born for sure, they are the little Lambs, but we better take care of their mommies because God gave them to one another. We are to make sure that every human being lives and dies with dignity with the basics.

This message was a lot easier to listen to in 2007, than 2010. Today we are filled with fears of the future even those of us who are still doing well are nervous, cautious, trusting fewer people and institutions than in the good old times. If the fear gets worse, we start yelling instead of feeding. We yell at other drivers, we yell at city hall, we yell at officials at ball games, we yell at our kids. Yelling seems to be the official sign of those who fear chaos.

In 2010 this once all powerful country who became the policeperson of the world hundreds of billions, even trillions feeding the hungry in every crisis in Haiti, Sudan, righting the wrongs, fighting wars for justice all over the world, out of the blue we are running out of even our green paper dollars and we are afraid of tomorrow, afraid of losing our jobs, our houses, our savings, our health. You can almost smell the fear in this city and country.

We used to trust the “experts” but we don’t trust anyone anymore. Today, 2 days after tax day, in the midst of this crisis the Church asks me to talk about CPC, the Catholic Parishes Campaign, or as some priests call it, the CPCC, the *Catholic Pastor’s Crying Campaign*. What more can I say, that I have not said in the last 20 years? What wisdom or story, can I dig up that will change minds living in fear? Last week, Deacon John and his lovely wife, Mary Grace, shared a couple’s wisdom about CPC. Now it is my turn but everything has changes since we made our goal, “once” in 2005, after 48 years. It sounds like we peaked late and may not peak ever again. Yet, we should be more confident and trusting because inside this place, our church family home, in the midst of chaos there is financial stability. Since we paid off our debt 17 years ago, we have never spent a penny more than we brought in, never been in the red, and never paid a bill late. Our house is built on the rock of a partnership between Jesus who preached the Gospel of love and caring for one another and a small group of people who follow Jesus and live his message of caring for the burdens of one another.

We are Catholic Christians first and we follow the financial wisdom of Jesus, not of America. We do not buy what we cannot afford we save for the future we do not need luxuries but just the basics. I must admit that we have not had a fire, a flood, a tornado, or a catastrophe. Some people credit me for all this financial security. I am not responsible for our status but I believe that we continue to balance our budget because we are following our “Partners” expert plan for how Christians are supposed to feed, take care of, even carry, the sheep, lambs, those with burdens they cannot carry alone.

For 17 years we have “tithed” 10% of everything we have donated on Sunday to the poor and worthy causes “*outside*” our little plot of land. When we began stewardship 17 years ago, a few good Christians, wiser and holier than me, felt that we had to “*practice what we preached.*” If I was to get up here at this pulpit each year and preach God’s commandment to “*tithe*” our first fruits to God, before we take anything from the field or pocket, we had to tithe to God first out of our collection basket, even before we pay my salary, or any bill, even our CPCC bill, we tithe. I can guarantee you that it has not always been easy. There have been times; I am ashamed to admit, when I tried to change the policy. About seven years ago, when we opened our doors to our Latino Catholic brothers and sisters, I tried to convince the Council that using that 10% to serve poor Latino children and families, was a good way to tithe to the poor. But, the Council, especially Jim Schmitt and Kathy Boyd, and a few others refused to cave in to my demands by reminding me that our Latino members belong to our parish, we are all responsible for one another. Tithing is about sharing with the poor and worthy causes outside our parish. Bu, I had an even better argument that was so wise I knew they would see that I am somewhat like Old Solomon. I recommended that we use our tithe to pay our CPC bill, since all that money was going to serve the poor, the missions, the Pope and Bishops, so that tithe of \$25,000.00 would go a long way toward paying that \$46,591.00 CPC bill which is certainly a worthy cause. The Council would have none of it. No, CPC is our responsibility not our tithe.

So, I am again, for the 21st time, I come here, “crying” for you to keep on giving as generously as you have been to your church family so we can pay our bills. I give you a pledge. Your Council will never spend a penny more than you give and we can raise and stay in the black with our partner Jesus Christ by our side. We also pledge that we will give away the first fruits of your donations, the first 10% of every dollar you give we will give away and not keep a penny for ourselves or our own programs. But, next weekend, this old white towel will be wet with my tears as I beg for generous pledges to the CPCC. Just like I cried April 15 as I drove to post office with my check, next week I want you to cry as you drive to church to drop in your pledge to CPCC. You don’t have to write a check, or use a credit card, or give cash, just your little old signature is good enough for us. We trust you. If we all make a pledge, I believe that we can again be as proud as we were five years ago. Boo Hoo!! Boo Hoo!!