

**THE A-HA MOMENT**  
**October 11, 2015 –John 21 : 15-19**  
**The Church of the Covenant**

I recently asked the Personnel Committee to write me a job description. As odd as it may sound, I am the only employee of the church who does not have one! I have carefully reviewed the draft and am pleased that it does not note that I am to have Extra Sensory Perception. Because sometimes I think folks think that I should know something that they haven't told me –like they're going into the hospital, or they're having rehab for 6 weeks, or they're sad over the loss of a loved one, or they're mad about something, or they would just like a conversation and a little TLC from the church. I'd like to say I have ESP and can intuit this from my own mind; but the truth of the matter is that we need a whole church to have a heart for pastoral care to make it work.

One of the saddest things for me as a pastor is when I feel we have “dropped the ball” on some pastoral care matter. Honestly, it grieves my heart and breaks it before the Lord. Sometimes it is a long time member and they have faithfully served the congregation in many ways, maybe even as a deacon who took to heart visiting the homebound, maybe a huge portion of their life was spent investing their time and their love at The Church of the Covenant, and then something happens in their life, and the church doesn't know and the church doesn't respond. It is an “A-Ha Moment” as I like to call it. And either all of their hopes and beliefs in their church are realized or they are not. We are there for them in their hour of need, or we are not. We show the love of Jesus Christ, or we do not. It's where the rubber meets the road for people –is all this talk of God and God's love and how we are known by “see how these Christians love one another”, it is true, or is it false? Is it the Gospel or is it a bunch of hot air? It is “The A-HA Moment”. And I will say again, it takes a whole congregation to make it work...

I'd like us to set two pieces of scripture in conversation with one another, please. My hope is that when we do we will have our own “A-Ha Moment” today, when our minds and our hearts are opened just that bit more to the truth the God's Word in Jesus. The two pieces of scripture are, first, the one I just read to you from the Gospel of John, where three times Jesus asks Peter, if Peter loves Jesus, and Peter responds, “*Lord, You know I love you.*” And Jesus responds in a three-fold sequence –“*Feed my lambs*”; “*Tend my sheep*”; “*Feed my sheep*”. (John 21: 15, 16, 17) Jesus is “The Good Shepherd” and we are “the sheep of His pasture”. We have entered into the narrow gate and into the sheepfold of God. If we stray the Good Shepherd leaves the 90 and 9 and goes to help the one who is in need. Jesus is saying to Peter –I have set the example for you, Feed My lambs, Tend My sheep, Feed My sheep. Do this and you show that you love me; do not do this, and all of your professions of love and confession of faith are just so much meaningless blather and hot air.

I'd like to contrast these scripture verses with the Bible story of the three denials of the Apostle Peter prior to Jesus' death on a cross at Calvary. Now Peter has been the bold and brash disciple. It is he who first proclaimed that Jesus is “*The Christ, the Son of the Living God.*” It is Peter who will attempt walking on water for the Lord. It is Peter who cries out that Jesus does not need to go to the cross. And if people come to take his Master away, that he will defend Jesus to the death. It is Peter who takes out a sword and cuts off the servant's ear to defend Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. So, then, it is this Peter, the rock, who has boldly confessed and followed Jesus who then slinks into the courtyard of the high priest, following Jesus at a distance, after they have seized and taken Jesus away to be tried and crucified. Jesus has prophesized in relation to Peter that Peter will deny Jesus three times before the cock crows. Peter vehemently denies that he will ever deny his Master and friend. He is confronted by a little serving maid, and the great Peter of brash and bold faith is fallen by the accusations of a little girl.

*“Are you not also one of this man’s disciples?” (John 18: 17) “I am not” states the coward who so boldly had once professed Jesus as Lord. “Are you not also one of his disciples?”, they ask (John 18: 25) and Peter denies his Master and friend again a second time. “I am not”. Finally, a third time Peter is confronted by the accusation (and there is a reason why the evil one is referred to in scripture as “The Accuser”) “Did I not see you in the Garden with HIM, (with Jesus)?” And again for a third time Peter denies Jesus “I do not know the man”. And immediately, the rooster crowed, “at once the cock crowed” And Peter went out and wept bitterly. For he remembered Jesus’ words of prediction to him that Peter would deny Jesus three times before the cock crowed. It was Peter’s first A-Ha Moment...*

So now let us put the two Bible stories together. The accuser comes and says, “Are you not also one of this man’s disciples?” And through word or deed, through things said or unsaid, through things done or left undone, we deny HIM. Contrast it now to the other Bible Story. So Jesus then comes to us and asks us, as He once asked Peter, “Do you love me more than these?”. And we say, Lord, you know in my heart I love you, I want to love you, I want to be that sort of person who loves You more than anything else in this life. And then Jesus says to us, “Then *“Feed My lambs”*. Second time: the accuser comes and hurls at us, “Are you also not one of His disciples?” And through the way we are, when the rubber meets the road, when the going gets tough, when suddenly it becomes costly and dangerous to follow Jesus, we deny Him. Contrast it a second time to the other Bible Story. So Jesus then comes to us a second time and asks, “So, do you love Me?” And we get a little upset now, “Lord, you know we love You –why do we come to church, why do we invest our time, why do we do what we do?” And then Jesus says to us, then *“Tend My sheep”*. And finally a third time the accuser comes and accuses us of being a Christian and we deny it, in our heart or out loud. And Jesus comes a third time and looks directly into our eyes and sees directly into our soul, and asks, “Do you love me, really?” “Lord, you know that we do.” Then, says Jesus, *“Feed My sheep.”* **THREE DENIALS. THREE QUESTIONS OF LOVE FROM THE MASTER. THREE PENANCES TO ABSOLVE THE DENIALS AND THE SIN AND OUR EMPTY PROFESSIONS OF FAITH.** Forgiveness, Peter, comes from loving me, sayeth Jesus; forgiveness, Peter, comes from demonstrating your love for me, Jesus, by **TENDING AND CARING FOR MY SHEEP**. If you love me, Peter, sayeth Jesus, then watch over my flock. It was Peter’s second great A-HA MOMENT.

Peter in the Bible always represents more than just himself. He is a biblical metaphor for the church as a whole. Any time you see Peter mentioned in the Bible he is the Rock upon which Christ will build His church. He is sign and symbol of the church Jesus establishes through His life, death and resurrection. He is the embodiment of the fruit of the death of Jesus on the cross and the precious blood shed for the establishment of the church and its mission and ministry. So when Jesus says to Peter –Feed My lambs –Tend My Sheep –Feed My Sheep. When Jesus says for emphasis three times “Take care of my sheep”. He is not just speaking to Peter, and He is not just speaking to pastors, and He is not just speaking to elders or deacons. He is speaking to the church, the whole church, and every member of it. Feed My Lambs –Tend My sheep –Feed My sheep is said to all of us in the voice of Jesus. It is our A-HA Moment. A moment where we resolve in our heart that there is never a time when some member of our church, particularly those who have served it so long and so well, ever have to think –“All this “love of God stuff” is just so much hot air and nonsense”.

For every failing and failure, every sin and denial, everything done or left undone, there is an opportunity to make it right by tending the sheep Jesus places around us every day. May it be our own A-HA Moment today. Amen and Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA  
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ON TO A FRIEND!*