

May 8, 2022 Mother's Day. Good Shepherd Sunday.
Pr. Steve

In the name of God, Abba-Imma, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

The first Mother's Day was in 1875, ten years after the Civil War, and it was a militant anti-war protest by women across the country saying, "No more slaughtering of husbands and sons and families. No more! Never again! Enough!" How often haven't human beings said that? That movement sparked what became the Women's Suffrage Movement in 1880. Just five years later, women said, 'We have lives too. We are not secondary citizens.'

And for forty years, the suffrage movement went on with public statements, rallies, underground work, and writings. Women being beaten at home and in public places, and attacked, and jailed, and killed. Forty years--until the vote came in 1920. Susan B. Anthony was one of those great leaders.

And Bev and I, having freshly returned from Rochester, New York (and I know many of you are desperate to get there) found in our travels that Susan B. Anthony is buried in Rochester--its a massive cemetery. And, they have a tradition in Rochester that, on Election Day hundreds of women from around the area come to her tombstone to put their "I voted" sticker on the tombstone. Now this creates huge traffic jam, and the whole community knows it. You do everything possible if you can avoid it, but it's actually a moment of pride for the people of Rochester.

One hundred years later in 2020, do you know who the largest non-voting block of registered voters were? White, college educated, women!

What is happening? What is happening? Can you imagine if some of those women were together in the same room with Susan B. Anthony, what she might have to say to them? I know it would begin with these words, "Listen to me", right? "Listen to me!" Wow...

One of the painful insights of theology, is that everything gets corrupted, especially the best things among us. This is living proof of that, isn't it? Painful--painful.

On this Good Shepherd Sunday, we have this text. Jesus says,
"My sheep listen to me. They hear my voice. They are listening for the voice."
Now, the sheep have evolved over centuries as well.

My great-grandfather was a Lutheran minister, actually a bishop, in what was then the Territory of Nebraska, which wasn't a state yet. So most of the members of his congregation were settlers. But now I've learned, you know, that Sitting Bull and Wounded Knee and the Ghost Dances of the Lakota tribes were going on at this time. I never learned anything about that in my family history and that was just a few hundred miles away--South Dakota.

Both grandfathers were Lutheran clergy, one in Milwaukee, Wisconsin--and his primary flock was German immigrants. My grandmother, at the age of 12, would go down to the train depot in Milwaukee, and because she spoke fluent German, would welcome German immigrants and refugees, helping connect them with families, or loved ones, or safe places to stay--whatever it took--because she heard this voice. There was no organization, she just did it on her own--did it for years. *'Who are you woman?!!'* Isn't that marvelous?

The other grandfather heard this voice that said he should go to India as a missionary. I never got to have a conversation with him about that. "What did you hear--13 years in India?" Amazing, isn't it?

And in my father's generation, more and more professional people began to come in to the church. Back in that day, the Lutheran Church was known as the Republican Party at prayer. And it was very true. That's really true.

Well, now we have the 'Sheep of Peace'. Isn't that a crazy image? Who are we? CEOs and CFOs, teachers, administrators, professors, PhDs in physics, and geophysics, and archaeology, and theology and, you know, just an ordinary congregation, right?

I take to heart, something Bill Carmel said a while back, which I think is really on the mark. He said, "You know, we don't gather to hear a message. We gather here to share a message."

And I think that would please Jesus very, very much. It's about taking that word in. What have we heard? And how does it get refined within us and among us--its churning, its possibilities, its ways of seeing who we are, and how to live in these times? I think that's marvelous.

We enact it in so many different kinds of ways, sometimes together, often times in our own individual lives in small and great ways. I remember Jack Pantaleo, who was a friend of Peace. This is back in 1982. He decided--with the AIDS crisis just exploding--to begin the first AIDS Ministry. He said, "It's wrong for young, gay men to be dying--alone, and in fear." There was no money. There was no organization. He heard this voice. It was a mothering ministry.

Some of you might remember back in 1992, at this congregation we prepared Easter baskets for men living and dying with AIDS, and they were beautiful baskets. They certainly had goodies in them, but mostly it was medical supplies. I called the press. They came and covered it--it was wonderful, you know--interviewed folks, and when they were done, a dozen, fifteen cars of members of the congregation drove off to deliver these Easter baskets, but secretly. Because nobody was out of the closet, then, [they] had to deliver them surreptitiously. ... Heard the voice--had to deliver.

I also remember the Farasani family. He's from South Africa. He'd been with us a couple of years, and suddenly, the National Church body cut off the minimal stipend that they were receiving, and told them with three young children, 'Go back to South Africa' while Tshenu and Madzunga were living under death threats and sentences. This I never understand about church--

I never will understand! And members of Peace came together and raised over \$15,000 dollars to sustain the family so that Mudzunga could complete her Master's in Education--survive.

Heard the voice--mothering ministries.

If you asked me to paint the picture of where Peace is going, it's impossible. I have no idea. Because it's always about the listening, right? It's that tuning in--in personal ways and communal ways--to what's happening. Where are the needs? What's evolving? What's creative? What's compassionate? It's wide open. There's no agenda here. We're not driving people towards one particular goal.

It is as Jesus says today also in that [Gospel of] John text, "*I have come to give you life*": life in its fullness and abundance and joy. And that's the sign, that's the mark of disciples--fully alive, fully awake, tasting possibilities, willing to contribute to the health and well-being of others as we nurture and care for one another.

Keep listening. It's the most dynamic thing you can do.
Keep listening!

Amen.

The peace which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.