

## “Love In Action”

This is how we know what love is:  
Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.  
And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.  
(1 John 3:16)

*The power of the Easter message*, wrote UUA minister Rev. Ward, *is a faith in love as the saving power of all life* (April 2009 Quest). In the Christian heart, Jesus is special because he is the person who put this love into action. A recent internet joke suggests that Jesus' fame has also settled into the heart of secular culture. Billy Graham was returning to Charlotte after a speaking engagement and when his plane arrived there was a limousine there to transport him to his home. As he prepared to get into the limo, he stopped and spoke to the driver. "You know" he said, "I am 87 years old and I have never driven a limousine. Would you mind if I drove it for a while?" The driver said, "No problem. Have at it." Billy gets into the driver's seat and they head off down the highway. A short distance away sat a rookie State Trooper operating his first speed trap. The long black limo went by him doing 70 in a 55 mph zone. The trooper pulled out and easily caught the limo and he got out of his patrol car to begin the procedure. The young trooper walked up to the driver's door and when the glass was rolled down, he was surprised to see who was driving. He immediately excused himself and went back to his car and called his supervisor. He told the supervisor, "I know we are supposed to enforce the law . . . But I also know that important people are given certain courtesies. I need to know what I should do because I have stopped a very important person." The supervisor asked, "Is it the governor?" The young trooper said, "No, he's more important than that." The supervisor said, "Oh, so it's the president." The young trooper said, "No, he's even more important than that." The supervisor finally asked, "Well then, who is it?" The young trooper said, "I think it's Jesus, because he's got Billy Graham for a chauffeur! (internet joke)

Although humorous, this joke also suggests that people who are not familiar with the whole of Jesus' story, don't have a clue about what his love in action was like. Love in action means *listening to the suffering of others without being consumed by it*; standing in solidarity with the powerless in a non-violent confrontation of evil; self giving sacrifice; and helping others at their point of need (based on The Easter Exam by Greg Ward, Quest, April 2009, p. 2). Traditionally during worship on the third Sunday in Eastertide we reflect on the Biblical metaphor Shepherd in order to learn more about the heavenly nature of Holy Love on earth. Shepherd is used as an image for God, Jesus, the Spirit of Love, and the people of Israel.

In the Hebrew scriptures Israelite leaders like Moses and King David were shepherds. In psalm 23 the psalmist pictured the Lord as a shepherd who guards, companions, comforts, anoints, and provides for God's people. The prophet Ezekiel used shepherd as a metaphor for identifying God's action toward *broken and scattered people*: "*I will keep the lost and I will bring back the strayed*" (Christian Century, April 21, 2009 p. 21). About a month ago I saw Shepherding Spirit at work gathering broken and scattered people together at the First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church of Scituate. The members of that congregation had hung several pictures on the walls to remind them of God's shepherding action among them. A large stained glassed image of the Mayflower claimed the front wall of the sanctuary. It highlighted God's action of bringing together the broken and scattered people by means of Pilgrim Covenantal Faith. On the wall in the fellowship and education room were posters that identified the Spirit of Belonging that weaves them together in Love. There was a co-exist poster with symbols of the major religions of the world; one that spelled peace in many languages; and another which affirmed sexual diversity and same sex marriage. On another wall hung a plaque that listed the names of members of that community of faith, who for over 375 years had participated in the Lord's shepherding

work of finding the lost and bringing the scattered back into God's fold. In covenant together in shepherding faith since 1631, a rainbow flag hung as the identifying symbol for their church.

In John's gospel, Jesus is imaged as The Good Shepherd. Jesus said about himself, I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me. *In describing himself as a good shepherd, not a hireling or a thief* writes Rev. Lindner, (director of ministry studies at the University of Chicago Divinity School) . . . *Jesus is . . . proclaiming the truth at the heart of the gospel: Christ's very being enacts God's relationship with the beloved creation, and is instigated not by us but by God. This is no voluntary association, no fair-weather friendship, no transactional contract. The sheep do not earn the Shepherd or elect him; nothing that we are or do can abrogate the relationship. We cannot stray or fall or fail in such a way as to be lost to God--ever--because we belong to God, "body and soul, in life and in death," as the Heidelberg Catechism would remind us* (Christian Century, April 21, 2009, p. 21).

In his letter to the church, John expanded upon this Spirit of belonging to God and Jesus in order to gather the community in good shepherd faith and in loving action. This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. You may recall that in John's Good Shepherd image, Jesus lays down his life not only for his flock, but also for others who are not yet of God's fold. Therefore, those who belong to Jesus not only lay down their lives for church friends, but also sacrificially give of themselves to those in need in the scattered community and the fragmented world.

## **For the People**

Anna May Say Pa

If I were a bird and able to fly afar,  
I would like to be a white dove to guide the people to freedom.

If I were a grain of sand,  
I would throw myself down to make a path for the people.

If I were the cloud in the sky,  
I would shelter and bring rains to the rice field.  
I would sacrifice my life for the suffering people

I would sacrifice my self  
no matter how many times I would have to die.

(Burma Institute of Theology p. 206 Imaging The Word year B)

It's Good Shepherd Sunday. . . faith's day for the Lord to grace us  
with the truth of who we are, the assurance of whose we are, and the  
courage to act with Holy Love.