

“Called by name”

On this **Mother’s Day and Festival of the Christian Home Sunday**, we put much of our focus on our important relationships. Obviously, we are celebrating the self-giving and sacrificial love our parents and, perhaps, our grandparents have given to us – especially our mothers. We are also examining and praising the self-giving and sacrificial love – service our Sunday School Staff and other members and friends of Round Grove United Church, United Church of Christ, have exhibited toward all of our children and Youth. And, let’s not forget the Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love our Divine Parent has demonstrated toward each of us, especially through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. As we consider our relationships, it is helpful to specifically note the dynamics they hold in common.

Called by name. Yes, in each of these valuable relationships all of the participants are called by name. Knowing each other’s names and using them in our relationships, indicates significant knowledge and interaction with one another. There is something important about being called by name, isn’t there?

For example, have you ever heard a parent or grandparent yelling outside for a child or grandchild to come home for dinner or for some other reason? Have you heard the escalation of the demands for obedience, including the use of the **child’s full formal name**? Maybe you heard your name!

A further example is reported in the Gospel of John. On Easter morning, Mary Magdalene found the tomb of Jesus empty, went to tell Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved about the empty tomb, talked to the angels in the tomb, began a conversation with a man who she thought was the gardener, and then, **she heard her name spoken** by the one, whose body she was seeking – that of her Master, Teacher, and Lord! **After Mary heard him call her by name, it was then she realized Jesus had been raised from the dead!**

When you are addressed by your name, there is an implied relationship between yourself and the person calling you by name. Today’s Gospel Lectionary Reading reports Jesus saying he has a special relationship with his followers – just like the one found between a shepherd and the sheep. Jesus explained sheep have a deep and close relationship with their shepherd. Listen closely to the evidence Jesus provided about the nature of his relationship with his followers. Referring to how the shepherd and the sheep interact, Jesus said, *“The gatekeeper opens the gate for him; the sheep hear his voice as he calls his own sheep by name, and he leads them out. When he has brought them out, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they know his voice.”*

Yes, often times, not only does being called by name go along with important relationships, but also, knowing one another’s voices – their pitch, tone, and emotional content. Additionally, in relationships where one of the parties is the leader and one or more are the followers, it is also important to recognize the “true leader” takes the lead in demonstrating the nature of the life one lives as a member of that group. On the other hand, not knowing or not calling one another by personal names indicates the relationship may be questionable. It is especially so, if the leader’s voice is not known and/or he or she does not take the lead in living the life the participants are expected to live. Jesus alluded to this insight when he said, *“They will not follow someone else; instead, they will run away from such a person, because they do not know his voice. ... The thief comes only in order to steal, kill, and destroy.”*

As I hinted earlier, the *“Good Shepherd”* not only takes the lead in exhibiting the life of the community but she or he is also prepared to sacrifice for the welfare of the followers. Jesus said this about himself, *“I have come in order that you might have life — life in all its fullness.”* Of course, we know Jesus leads us to *“life in all its fullness”*, not by his willingness *“to die for”* us but through his actually **Sacrificially Suffering Death** for us and having his faith in God astoundingly affirmed through his **Resurrection!**

Our Leader, or as the Bible says, **“Our Lord and Savior”** – Jesus Christ, calls us to follow his example – to follow him – follow our leader. We are to relate toward one another – Parent and/or Grandparent to Child – between Spouses – between Partners – between fellow members or participants in this Family of Faith – and as Leaders in Relationships – **to serve and/or love in a self-giving and sacrificial way!**

Sermons.com reminds us, “Sheep are great at playing ‘follow the leader.’ The ‘herd mentality’ looms large in a sheep brain. If sheep are in a line and a stick is thrust in front of one animal, forcing it to jump over that barrier, all those following will jump over that stick — whether it is there or not. For sheep, seeing a member of their flock jump over ‘something’ is enough to make the next animal jump up and over whatever that ‘something’ is — whether it physically exists or not. Make one sheep jump and you can make a whole herd jump — regardless of whether there is actually anything to jump over.” (sermons.com, “Apron Up”) **Let’s follow Jesus’ self-giving and sacrificial love because it is the best way to relate to one another and not just because everyone else is jumping over the imaginary stick!**

Parents, Grandparents, our Sunday School Staff, our Youth, our Children and our Members and Friends of Round Grove United Church, UCC, are all **called to follow the example of God’s Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love shown through God’s Son, Jesus Christ.** Since this is Mother’s Day, it might help provide us insight into how we are to relate to one another – love one another in a self-giving and sacrificial way (pause) by sharing “A Mother’s Prayer” by an unknown author. It goes:

“If I live in a house of spotless beauty with everything in its place, **but have not love**, I am a housekeeper – not a homemaker.

If I have time for waxing, polishing, and decorative achievements, but have not love, my children learn cleanliness – not godliness.

Love leaves the dust in search of a child’s laugh.

Love smiles at the tiny fingerprints on a newly cleaned window.

Love wipes away the tears before it wipes up the spilled milk.

Love picks up the child before it picks up the toys.

Love is present through the trials.

Love reprimands, reproves, and is responsive.

Love crawls with the baby, walks with the toddler, runs with the child, then stands aside to let the youth walk into adulthood.

Love is the key that opens salvation’s message to a child’s heart.

Before I became a mother I took glory in my house of perfection. Now I glory in God’s perfection of my child.

As a mother, there is much I must teach my child,” **“but the greatest of all is love.”** (Author Unknown)

Jesus Christ is our “Good Shepherd”, who calls each of us and all of God’s children by name! We know his voice – his leadership – his example and his self-giving and sacrificial love! Jesus leads us out to live that same love in all of our relationships, especially in our families and our church family. **Let’s celebrate our mothers and all who have loved us with this “agape” self-giving and sacrificial love embodied by our “Good Shepherd”, Jesus Christ.** Let’s trust God’s Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love, Forgiveness, Healing, Welcome, Reconciliation, and the New Faith Relationship with God, as we live the New Life in Christ. **The Risen Jesus calls you by name – follow him!** Amen.