

John 21.15-19  
Good Shepherd-Austin, TX  
Nov. 13, 2016

*Living a Life of Promise*  
*Feed my sheep-John 21.15-19*

Good morning (evening). My name is Kirkland Knight, but everyone calls me Skully, so please feel free to call me that. It's a nickname I picked up my first day at Camp Hardtner in Pollock, Louisiana when I was 15 and I've had it ever since. Camp Hardtner is also the place I met Morgan Allen and Aimee Klaas-Bostwick, two pretty amazing people and great friends.

And I don't want to get too deep into anything before I say what I came here to say. I came here to thank you. To thank Morgan, the vestry, and the people of this church because of the unbelievable generosity you showed our community during the flooding in Baton Rouge. And I need to tell you, Louisiana is my home, and for the most part, it always has been. I've lived through all sorts of storms, hurricanes-even Katrina, and I'm not saying this was worse-but I've never been in the middle of anything like this before.

We had over 20 inches of rain in two days. A rotating system sat over us like a small hurricane and just dumped water on us like nothing I had ever seen. The rain stopped on a Saturday. I live 10 houses down from our school so I was going back and forth to school taking pictures and videos and sending them to other school administrators, hoping the creek that runs through our neighborhood wouldn't flood our school. But no one, and I mean no one, thought it would even come close to flooding homes in our neighborhood. In over 50 years, through storms and hurricanes, Woodland Ridge had never come close to flooding.

The next day at noon, after being awakened at 4:30 am by a neighbor who showed us the rising water in the street and informed us that you couldn't drive out of the neighborhood in any direction, I took my two daughters out of our neighborhood in my canoe. And then at about 3:00, I took my wife, Mary Sue, and our 85-pound Lab, Charlie, in that same canoe on the same one-mile journey to the nearest dry street. It took over an hour to go that one mile. The creek that usually runs 2-3 feet deep, some 30 feet below the bridge, was flowing so hard over the bridge, that if I had tried to paddle my canoe across it, the current would have pinned me against the guardrail. I walked my canoe down Woodland Ridge Blvd. up to that bridge, in chest deep water that was flowing so hard, that if I tried to paddle my canoe, the best I could do was sit still. This is the road I drove down at 10:30 the night before. This the road our school is on. This is the road my home is on.

The next week was like nothing I have ever been a part of. We returned home and miraculously our home was dry. The true miracle was a stubborn friend who brought us sandbags via boat

Sunday morning as the water was rising. We went home on Tuesday morning and there was sand at every door where the receding water had pulled it from the sandbags. Our home was literally surrounded by water. We were lucky. Our school was not so lucky. And so many in our Baton Rouge and school community were simply devastated.

In our neighborhood alone, I would say 3/5 of the homes were flooded. 3-4 feet of water. Homes, cars, everything. Gone. We started to check in with faculty and staff and school families. Episcopal High School, or as we have started to call ourselves, The Episcopal School of Baton Rouge, is a PreK-12 school of about 975 students and about 185 faculty and staff so this was a daunting task. We set up Google forms and had people check in. We did needs assessments in each division. I coordinated volunteers for days and then we got a Facebook page set up so we could get people who needed help connected to people who could help.

Some worked on getting the school up and running. I worked with the people. People in need. People who needed to help. Supplies, addresses, food, you name it and people brought it, people did it and one of the proudest things I can say about all of this, is that there was not a single teacher or school family, that needed help, that didn't get it. We had armies of kids, some coaches and teachers and parents, but mostly kids-massive bands of roaming teenagers, cleaning out houses, delivering food, bringing supplies-doing everything that needed to be done. It was amazing. But this is where y'all come in.

As we started to think about starting school, it became evident that many of our faculty and staff had suffered major damage in the floods. And when I say major, I want you to think about this. What if one day, without warning-no one forecasted or predicted this event-your home flooded with 4 feet of water (some places 8-10 feet), your cars flooded, your parents' and grandparents' homes flooded, you lost everything you owned—and had no insurance. This was the story with lots of people because this flood happened in areas that don't flood.

We quickly established 2 funds-The Knights of Compassion fund for our faculty and staff and the Bounce Back fund for our facilities at school. And your donations to our Knights of Compassion fund made it possible for us to hand 31 teachers who were directly impacted by the flood, a check for \$2500 as they prepared to go home at the end of our first week of school.

I needed you to get a glimpse of what it was like, and what people experienced that day, that week, and are still going through, so that you can understand how much your gift meant to us, so that then you can understand the breadth and depth of gratitude that I bring to you from our community.

That is what I bring to you. That is what I have to say to you. But since I'm a priest, I had to think about, not just what I wanted to say to you, but what God, what the Spirit, wanted me to say to you about all of this. And Morgan told me that God wanted me to talk to y'all about stewardship, so I'm taking his word for it. I'm only kidding, sort of. Back in August when Morgan and I were talking about all of this-our

needs and your gifts, I told him I wanted to be able to come and thank you all at some point, in person. But I do think that this is the perfect time to come and be with you, and thank you. And not in any manipulative way to get you to give, but to simply remind you about why any of us give at all.

I asked to come here, so that I could thank you. Thank you for keeping your promise. Your theme of *Living a Life of Promise* is not lost on me, or the any people who wept because of the gift that you gave them when they were in the greatest need they had ever experienced. I am not here to ask you to make a promise, I'm here to thank you for keeping the ones you already made. Well, that's not entirely true, either.

I *am* here to thank you for doing what the church does-seeing your neighbors needs and then find ways to love and serve them-love and serve us. But if I were to leave you with the impression that you're done-Promise made, promise kept. Good job. If I preached that to you, I'd be wrong. And if you believed it, you'd be wrong too. We can't stop there.

This gospel passage-with Jesus asking Peter the question 3 times, Peter responding 3 times, and Jesus commanding 3 times-*Peter do you love me, Lord you know I love you, Then feed my sheep*-it's an interesting one. I'm sure that if you've heard this lesson preached on before you'll remember that it's pretty universally accepted that the 3-fold Q and A corresponds to peter's 3 denials of Jesus. It's sometimes said that different forms of the word love are used and it changes the meaning, but I'm not really interested in that today. I want us to look at this differently. I want us to think about this church and the promises you are making—and keeping.

You see Jesus asks Peter, Do you love me? And in something I read, it said “translates” Peter's response-his love for Jesus-into the charge-*Feed my sheep*. It reminds me of those if-then statements that were part of the SAT. Jesus' version is simple, if you love me, then feed my sheep. If you love God, then love your neighbor. He translates our response into something more. And to put it bluntly, Jesus has translated your faithful response, your love for God and the Church into the command to feed his sheep-the command to go and love others the way that Jesus has loved. And you have done that.

You have lived lives of promise. You have sought and served Christ where he is to be found and, loved your neighbors. And that's great. It's awesome. Thank you. Now go do it again. I'm sure Peter thinks after the first exchange-this is great. And then Jesus asks again...and again. Just like you. You have been called as people of God to a relationship with God and this Church, *this* church. And you have committed yourselves, done great work, made God's love and purpose come alive and have made it known to the world. And I, as much as anyone, am thankful to you for it. Now go do it again. And again.

Jesus asks Peter this question, not once, but over and over. He charges and commands Peter over and over. We have to continue to make and keep promises to God so that our loving response can be translated into the directive to love one another. If you say you love me, great. Show me. Show me again. Again.

Now one of the things I love about being a school chaplain, is that I don't have to do stewardship stuff. Ever. So the nice thing about preaching about it someplace else, is that you get to do it and then leave

the next day. So you can say anything you want really. But in all seriousness, knowing the kind of leader Morgan is, knowing his commitment to the gospel and the mission of the Church and his love for God and for you, it became evident to me as I read all the things that are going on here and experienced first-hand the love of neighbor that flows from here, I realized that people here don't give out of their duty as a member to a church that already exists, it's not like a fee to an institution or a club, it is the foundation upon which y'all build and rebuild this church every day.

The work that happens here is not something that is done by a few who are willing to get their hands dirty, but by an entire community that is dedicated to making Christ known in the world-always looking for the places where God's helping and healing hands are needed and becoming the touch of God to those who need to feel it. It is the cornerstone of what you do. Literally.

I love the idea of the Signing of the Scroll and having it placed in the time capsule that will be the cornerstone of your renewed Church. Your sanctuary will be rebuilt. It will be a new promise.

It will be your response, translated in to yet another command to love and Feed the Sheep. And this community and every name on that scroll will be the cornerstone of your ministry. Your community-this Body of Christ-this Promise filled congregation will be the foundation and that foundation will bear the weight of the needs of the world and make God's love real.

You have been asked, *Do you love me*. You have responded, *Lord, you know we love you*. You have been commanded, *Feed my sheep*. And you have done it. You have kept that promise and I thank you from the bottom my heart. Now we all have to go and do it again. *Amen*.