

## Easter 4B John 10:11-18

Today is traditionally known as Good Shepherd Sunday. For many of us, the mention of sheep conjures up different images such as the image of a warm sweater or the memory of a good meal.

We may remember the nursery rhyme "Mary had a little lamb," or the television hand puppet named Lamb Chop, but very few of us regard sheep as familiar companions. Thus we might not appreciate the depths of intimacy captured in the declaration, "I am the good shepherd."

For many people in the ancient world, shepherding was more than an occupation; it was their life, their very identity. The needs of their sheep determined how they spent their time, for their flocks had to be fed and watered and protected.

The life of the shepherd was anything but carefree. Because of the total commitment of the shepherd to the sheep, this image seemed an appropriate one to characterize the king, who was also expected to be totally committed to his people.

It was because the human leaders failed in their responsibilities toward their charges that God declared, "I myself will look after and tend my sheep" (Ezek 34:11).

The Gospel description of the good shepherd matches perfectly the responsibilities of both the shepherd and the king. The introductory words of Jesus' declaration, "I am" are mindful of God's response to Moses when he asked for God's name: "I am who am".

By making these words his own, is Jesus claiming to be divine? Is he assuming guardianship responsibilities over the people? The answer to both questions is a subtle but unmistakable yes.

This is all quite poetic, but what does it have to do with people who live in a technological society, rather than in the hills and plains of ancient Israel—people who are struggling with the realities of war and deprivation?

Today's readings encourage us in our need to turn to this "good shepherd," whose primary concern is our safety and well-being.

The one who safeguards us is not a mighty warrior who comes in military array. Our shepherd is the one who was rejected; the one who was hunted down, humiliated, tortured and hung naked on a tree to die in shame.

The one who safeguards us is the cornerstone of the building, holding it together, forming a firm foundation so that the structure will not collapse. Our shepherd is an unlikely Saviour.

Here again we see that Easter has turned things inside out. Life springs from death; strength is born of weakness. These words may sound empty in times of war and violence and hatred, but they cry out the truth of the resurrection.

We may feel helpless in the face of the terrors unleashed in today's world, but the words of Jesus should comfort us: "I am the good shepherd; I'll take care of it."

The 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm is not a prescription for the answers. But it is one person's prayer of gratitude to the one in whom they found the doorway to life. It certainly doesn't say anything like "Go to church and all this will be yours!"

But its popularity is testimony that many people have, like the writer David, found that it is as they journeyed into deep communion with God, as they learned to allow God to shepherd them, that they found the source of real life, of life in all its fullness, of food for our deepest hungers and hopes.

When we gather at the Altar to receive communion, it certainly doesn't look like a banquet spread before us to satisfy our every desire. And it isn't. But it is a doorway, an entry point to the banquet room.

You can gather around the doorway and then you can walk away—you can go back to shopping for the goods and services that promise the world. Or you can go through the doorway and enter the

journey into God. For it is only in God, where deep speaks to deep, that you will discover what it is you were really hungering for.

Those images in the psalm are no more than windows, no more than glimpses of what fulfillment might look like. It is only on the journey into God, the journey of prayer, as this psalm is a prayer, that we will ever know what the psalmist meant about our deepest yearnings finding their answer in God and with the Lord as our shepherd we need nothing more.

Jesus is the good shepherd, he is a model of servant leadership, gathering his people into a unified community, healing the sick or wounded, protecting them and suffering for their welfare. Above all he served their interests and not his own.

In our parish today we are reaching out to help others in need. We support the Glen Cairn Community Centre, by providing food, clothing and assist them in other endeavours. We donate to the Huron Hunger Fund and assist with Daily Bread.

We provide ministry to Meadow Park and those who are homebound. We have a ministry to newcomers. We have a prayer and card ministry to those who need support. We are the shepherds of today in our community, and we need to continue to be upholding the model of Jesus as the good shepherd in our busy lives that we lead each day.

We are all his sheep. Do we stray often??? I think that we all do at some point but getting back on track and being attentive to what our Lord is calling us to be and do we will win the race. We haven't been asked to lay down our lives as Jesus did, but we need to ask ourselves what other ways are there of laying down our lives that will empower others because of our dedication to the Gospel.

Every Sunday is a little Easter it is a time to celebrate the mystery of the resurrection. It is a time to be together with other Christians who have committed themselves to Christ and gather for worship. With Jesus Christ as our Shepherd, if we follow him and are active in the work and the mission of our church we will grow spiritually and be prosperous.

For that to happen Christ must be first in our lives, and when fed at the altar by him we are nourished with spiritual food to use the door that he opens for us to move forward and empower others in the life of Christ.

The love that Jesus gave and continues to give to us. The love that we as Christians give to each other, for it is not so much what we receive as we gather on Sundays as it is about what we share with each other in Christian love.

Jesus Christ is our Good Shepherd, Let us always follow him. Amen. Alleluia.