

St Thomas and St Thomas of the Air Church  
April 18, 2021  
Easter II  
Good Shepherd Sunday  
rmcneely+

From the themes of today's Epistle and Gospel  
Today is informally known as "Good Shepherd Sunday"

So I am compelled to tell you a Shepherd story:  
It seems that a shepherd was looking after his sheep by the side of  
a little used country road.

When a man in a new shiny Porsche screeched to a stop.  
The driver was dressed in a new Armani suit, he had Gucci shoes

Ray ban Sunglasses

TAG-Heuer wrist watch

Pierre Cardin tie

He gets out of the Porsche and asks the shepherd

" if I can tell you how many sheep you have, will you give  
me one of them?"

the shepherd looks at the young man, looks at the vast flock  
and says "Sure"

the man pulls a lap top out of the trunk

connects it to his satellite receiver

enters a NASA space based surveillance web site

scans the area into his GPS software

opens a database with 60 Excel tables filled with algorithms and  
pivot tables

and then pulls out a 127 page report on his mini-printer

He turns to the shepherd and says "you have exactly 1,928 sheep.  
Surprised, the shepherd says; "that is correct. You can take your  
pick of the flock. Pick out one sheep.

The young man takes an animal and stuffs it in the Porsche.

Just as he is about the speed off,

The shepherd says: If I guess your profession, can I have my animal back?

The man says : OK, why not.

The shepherd says: “You are an IT consultant”

The man is flabbergasted

“how did you know that”

The shepherd says;

Very simple

You came here without being asked

You charged me a fee to tell me something I already knew

And you don't know a thing about my business.

Now, can I have my dog back?

***I am the good shepherd  
I lay down my life for the sheep.***

Shepherds are common and important figures in the Bible:

Abel the son of Adam and Eve

Abraham

Isaac

Jacob and his 12 sons (the 12 tribes of Israel)

Moses and Prophets like Amos were shepherds

David, who slew Goliath and was King

David's 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm: The Lord is my Shepherd, is known by millions

Rachael, Jacob's wife,

Rebekah, Isaac's wife

And Zipporah, Moses' wife, were all shepherdesses.

It was to Shepherds

that the angel Gabriel first announced the birth of our savior

and it was the Shepherds  
 that were first to arrive to greet the baby Jesus.

So it is against this backdrop that Jesus tells us that He is the Good Shepherd,,  
 and Peter tells us  
 we were as sheep gone astray  
 but now are returned unto the Shepherd  
 and the guardian of our souls.

What is it?  
 What are the character traits of shepherds that  
 the Bible,  
 Our Lord and St Peter  
 Bring to our attention today?

More than 160 years ago in England there lived a young priest:  
 Frederick W. Robertson  
 A renowned clergyman/son of an army commander  
 On Good Shepherd Sunday all those years ago He said of  
 shepherds:

“Beneath the burning skies and the clear starry nights  
 Of Palestine

There grows up between the shepherd and his flock  
 An union of attachment and tenderness.

It is the country,  
 where at any moment sheep are liable  
 to be swept away by some mountain torrent,  
 Or carried off by hill-robbers  
 Or torn by wolves.

At any moment their protector may have to save them  
 by personal hazard.

Every hour of the shepherd’s life is (at) risk.

Sometimes for the sake of an armful of grass  
 in the parched summer days,  
 he must climb precipices almost perpendicular  
 and stand on a narrow ledge of rock,  
 where the wild goat will scarcely venture.

Pitiless showers,  
 driving snows,  
 long hour of thirst—  
 all this a shepherd must endure  
 if the flock is to be kept at all.

And thus there grows up between the shepherd  
 and the dumb creatures he protects,  
 a kind of friendship

You love those for whom you risk, and they love you;  
 therefor it is  
 that,  
 not as here where the flock is driven,  
 the shepherd goes before and the sheep follow.

They follow in perfect trust,  
 even though  
 he should be leading them away  
 from a green pasture,  
 by a rocky road,  
 to another pasture they cannot yet see

Hirelings are shepherds but not good shepherds...  
 they are tested by danger...

Now a man is a hireling  
 when he does his duty for pay.  
 He may do it in his way faithfully.  
 The paid shepherd  
 would not desert the sheep for a shower  
 or a cold night.

But the lion and the bear-  
 he is not paid to risk his life against them  
 and the sheep are not his,  
 so he leaves them to their fate...  
 the cause of the sheep is not his cause.”

Some of you may recall the 16 mm film “Morning Star”  
 that we saw a few years ago  
 About the annual 200 mile trek in Arizona  
 to White Mountain  
 Of the shepherd Rosario Lucero  
 And the hardships and the sacrifices he made  
 to get his flock safely to summer pasture.  
 The abiding characteristics of shepherds  
 Are courage, independent self-reliance, loyalty  
 self-determination and sacrifice.  
 And the love that motivates them.

But the cause of Jesus is the sheep.  
 He is the good shepherd.  
 To Him risk does not even matter.  
 There is certainty and no question.  
 He will give His life for the sheep.  
 He gave His life for the sheep,  
 knowingly  
 and voluntarily,  
 He submitted to the torture of the cross  
 to defeat the evil, and sin,  
 to defeat death,  
 and to give his sheep the chance for everlasting life.  
 There is perhaps nowhere else in scripture  
 where we see better evidence  
 of Jesus’ great mission to save mankind  
 than right here.

The disciples would not know for months  
what Jesus was talking about when he told them:

“I lay down my life for the sheep”.

They could not know the power  
and the depth of His love  
that was behind His statement.

Now, there is irony in this.

Jesus who, at His baptism, at the moment of the beginning of his  
earthly ministry, is called out as the Lamb of God, by John the  
Baptist

is later the Good Shepherd of the lambs  
and finally is Himself the sacrifice

Just as the lambs were being sacrificed at Passover  
so Jesus was being sacrificed on the Cross.

Many of the sheep raised in Bethlehem were bred to be sacrificed  
in the temple.

The Shepherd sacrifices himself to save the sheep. Here Jesus  
sacrifices Himself to save us from our sins.

Now, as you know, I have never had much to do with sheep in my  
life

but my good wife has;  
hundreds of thousands of them.

She grew up on a sheep and cattle station in NZ.

She says sheep are

smelly,

dirty,

completely helpless

(when rain soaked, if they fall over, left unattended they will die),

but most of all she will tell you sheep  
are fundamentally stupid animals.

Forget everything Hollywood ever told you about sheep they are caveman stupid.

The point is not to denigrate sheep  
But that sheep are completely reliant upon their shepherds  
for everything,  
even their very lives and existence.

While it is not particularly complimentary of our species; the  
inspired word of God in Holy Scripture  
equates us with sheep in order to complete the metaphor.  
It may be an accurate comparison.

We too are completely reliant upon our Shepherd  
for our lives  
and our immortal souls  
and for the life to come.

And I have to admit that we too can be  
as helpless,  
forgetful and stupid  
and as stubborn as sheep.

Like sheep we are vulnerable:  
Without their shepherd  
sheep are vulnerable to the attack of wolves,

Like the sheep, without our Shepherd  
we too are vulnerable to the attack of the evil  
that lurks in our lives.

The evil, like the wolves, can tear apart our souls and destroy us.  
we need a shepherd for protection.

And like the wolves, our sins can also tear apart our souls.  
We need a Shepherd to protect us from ourselves and to  
forgive our sins.

Like sheep

we are carried off by the robbers of our souls  
and we need a Shepherd to return us to the fold.

Like sheep,

we can be stampeded, scattered,  
isolated from each other and lost.

We need a Shepherd to quell the panic,  
to find us when we are lost  
and to bring us home  
to the protection of His church.

Like sheep,

we can recognize the storms in our lives  
but sometimes cannot come up with what to do about them.

We need a shepherd to guide us back to safety.

Like the rain soaked sheep,

the troubles of our lives can knock us down.  
Without a shepherd, we cannot get up  
and will die a spiritual death.

We have that Shepherd . . . the good Shepherd.

Are we prepared to be devoted members of His flock?

Are we prepared to hear His voice

To follow where He leads,  
even over a rocky road to a pasture we have not yet seen?

St Peter closed today's Epistle with this:

I think I will too:

For ye were as sheep gone astray  
But are now returned unto the Shepherd  
And Bishop of your souls.



