

St Thomas and St Thomas of the Air Church
Easter II
April 14, 2024
rmcneely+

I am the Good Shepherd
. . . and I lay down my life for the sheep.

Here at St Thomas, we are blessed with scripture, the inspired
word of God

To bring us closer to God,
To Christ.

And so it is the purpose of the weekly Collects

The Epistles and Gospels

To edify,

To show us who this man Jesus is.
To show us the way to Him,

This week we are directed by the words of two men;

Two men who walked with Jesus
Heard His words, touched Him,

Two men who knew Him.

Two men who tell His story
First hand, from what they saw and heard.

This week, the Propers, the Collect, the Epistle and Gospel

The hymns and the anthems,

Cry out with one voice

One subject;
Jesus as shepherd of us all.

And so, in the Anglican World, today is known

As Good Shepherd Sunday.

And we get to know Jesus from a different perspective.

It is the purpose of these brief weekly sermons
 To remind us that even though we have been delivered
 From the bondage of sin,
 We are now all the more subject to the
 Tribulations the unbelieving world can afflict.

Today our help comes from the writings of Sts Peter and John
 And the words of Jesus Himself.
 Who takes us back to ancient times
 History and culture steeped in the Old Testament shepherds:

Abel, the son of Adam and Eve was a shepherd
 Abraham was a shepherd
 Isaac was a shepherd
 Jacob and his 12 sons (the 12 tribes of Israel)
 Moses and Prophets like Amos were all shepherds.

David, who slew Goliath and saved a Nation and was King
 Was a shepherd.
 David's 23rd psalm: "The Lord is my Shepherd",
 was known by thousands.

Rachael, Jacob's wife,
 Rebekah, Isaac's wife
 And Zipporah, Moses' wife, were all shepherdesses of the Old
 Testament.

All those centuries ago, the people who heard Jesus speak of a
 shepherd knew very well what it meant to be a shepherd.

But, our world has become so separated from the land
 That when elementary school kids are asked the question
 "where does milk come from?"
 They incredulously answer "from the store".

In order to follow what Jesus is telling us
 We need to re-visit the life of a shepherd.
Some of you may recall a film loaned to us for a movie night
 By the generosity of Fritz Maytag several years ago.
It was a print of a 50's era black and white 16mm documentary
 Grainy and with no recorded sound
 A voice over narration.

Of the trek

 From The Salt River Valley near Tempe Arizona
 Up to the White Mountains in the Fort Apache
 Reservation.

One man, Rosalio Lucero, one shepherd

 Wizened with age, his leathery skin bronzed by the sun,
 Walks some 200 miles
 Driving 2000 sheep over 52 days.

There is nothing like a good documentary to transport you.
The journey was in the dust of the Arizona high desert summer.
It was under the blistering sun of the day
 And the freezing cold of the night,
 With only a tarp for shelter.

There were days without water, without food.

Rosalio was constantly on duty.

 Even in the dead of night

 He arose from sleep to stop the sheep from stampeding away
 To find and return the strays to the flock.

With only a rod he had to ward off predators stalking the flock.

He removed the needles of cactus,

 thorns that got into the eyes
 and penetrated the skin of the sheep,

 That entangled their wool from chest to legs, crippling them.

He treated them for disease.

He kept them on the journey to a greener pasture that they had not seen across the dessert with no trail to guide them.

He endured torrential rain and even snow in the high country.

Rosalio was in constant danger the entire trip.

But despite it all

2000 sheep began the journey

and 2000 sheep completed the journey.

Rosalio died a few years after the film was made.

And we begin to see what it meant, what it took to be a shepherd.

Jesus speaks to us through Peter and John in metaphor.

Shepherd and sheep.

We have seen what it takes to be a shepherd but we need to know some things about the sheep in order to fully understand what Jesus is telling us this morning.

Now, I know nothing about sheep

But my good wife does.

She was raised on a sheep and cattle station in New Zealand

And was raised with sheep, thousands of them.

She will tell you that sheep are fundamentally dumb animals

Stupid even.

Their tiny brains do not equip them for their own survival.

Sometimes their wool fleece becomes so saturated with water

That they fall over and cannot get up.

Without the help of the shepherd, they will founder and die.

Sheep have natural enemies, predators who survive on the kill.

The sheep have no weapon of defense,

No sharp teeth or claws.

They run slowly and awkwardly and cannot escape

The grace, agility and speed of their enemy.

Their only defense is an instinctual crowding together
“Mobbing” they call it,
Which only minimizes the success of the attack.

My dear friends, I am afraid that in Jesus’ metaphor
We are the sheep.
Not a compliment of our species, I know
But sometimes a harsh reality.
He who created us knows us so well.

Like the sheep, we can be fundamentally stupid.
Like the sheep we are sometimes knocked down and cannot get up.
Like the sheep we have a natural predator,
The devil and all the evil of our world.
Like the sheep we have no sharp teeth or claws
No swift ability to escape
But like the sheep we have a natural instinct to gather together
To gather together here
Within these sacred walls,
An oasis in a secular dessert,
For protection,
For the love of God
The powerful antidote to evil.

Like the sheep we find ourselves dependent
And in need of a shepherd;
To protect us,
Pick us up when we fall,
Find us when we are lost,
Treat the diseases of our souls,
To nourish our souls with His body and blood,
To guide us along that narrow pathway to God
Guide us along a rocky trail,
To a greener pasture we have not yet seen.

And Jesus, the Son of God, the Christ

Today promises that He is that Shepherd.

The Good Shepherd who knows His sheep,

Ever on duty,

Who at the sign of danger stands by to protect His sheep

Who would give His life for His sheep

Who gave His life for His sheep.

In the words of St Peter:

“For ye were as sheep going astray;

But are now returned unto the Shepherd

And Bishop of your souls.”