

Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church  
 Second Sunday after Easter  
 April 19, 2026  
 rmceely+

. . . the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep

Today is one of those occasions in the Church when everything comes together in one, clear, unified thought.

The Collect, the Epistle and the Gospel

Even the Communion hymn cry out for the Shepherd.  
 Can it be any wonder that today is known by its nickname:  
 Today is Good Shepherd Sunday.

Owing to the thoughtful kindness of a member of the Church,  
 It has acquired a special significance here at this little miracle church.

I'll tell you that story in a minute.

Shepherds have been an ancient and significant feature of the Bible.

Many of its bold and leading examples worked as shepherds:

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 at Bethlehem.

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

So, you see, The inspired word of God is replete with the examples of Shepherds.

Have you ever asked yourself why?

Why shepherds and  
Why are many of the principals of the Bible shepherds?

The Collect for today lays down a challenge across the centuries;  
May we daily endeavor to follow the steps of His Holy life.  
May we live our lives as Jesus did.

Jesus Himself describes His life as that of a Shepherd; a good shepherd.

So if we are to try to live the life He led,  
Are we not to be as the Shepherds of Biblical times?

St Peter's Epistle is the clear inspiration for the Tomas Cranmer's Collect.

Peter advised that Jesus left for us an example  
And that we should follow His steps.  
He summarizes his advice:  
that we "are now returned to the Shepherd  
and Bishop of our souls".

When Peter wrote his Epistles, it was a time of imminent persecution and unmerited cruel suffering.

He points us to the example of Christ.

In our time of secular unbelieving we look to our Shepherd.

So, what are the characteristics of Shepherds to which scripture  
The Collect, Epistle and Gospel and the very words of Jesus  
are leading us?

Perhaps the best way to explore that question is to return to the thoughtful generosity of one of you.

It was several years ago, just after Good Shepherd Sunday  
 That I arrived at the Church to find an envelope addressed to  
 “Our Good Shepherd” in the parish hall.  
 In it, was a CD and a note that said simply “Fritz”  
 And would I please return the CD after we had seen it.  
 In those days the Bible Study Group met on Wednesday evenings  
 At the Church.  
 And I adopted a custom of “Movie Nights”  
 When we watched films every now and then rather than  
 Working on scripture.  
 It was a fun time with popcorn and theater treats.

Some of you may recall the 16 mm film “Morning Star”  
 That was the CD contained in the envelope  
 that I found in the Canon Wilder Parish Hall.

It was an Encyclopedia Britannica documentary.  
 a grainy copy of the tv broadcast from the ‘50s.  
 Filmed in black and white with a hand held camera,  
 no recorded sound,  
 With no sophisticated editing or technological wonders.  
 It was raw, crude and powerful.  
 It documented the annual 200 mile 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 to ward off predators stalking the flock.  
He removed the needles of cactus,  
    thorns that got into their eyes  
    and penetrated the skin of the sheep,  
    That entangled their wool joining 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 desert 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.  
Oh, the film was loaned to us by the generosity of  
    Fritz Maytag.  
    A friend of St Thomas' and now I am proud to say of mine.

We begin to see  
The abiding characteristics of shepherds  
    Are courage,  
    independence,  
    self-determination  
    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,  
    and lovingly.  
He submitted to the torture of the cross  
    to defeat the evil, and sin,  
    to defeat death,  
    and to give his sheep the chance of everlasting life.

So in the Biblical metaphore Jesus is the Shepherd, the good  
Shepherd.

    We are His sheep.

Not a particularly flattering metaphore.  
But occasionally an apt one.

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

but my good wife has;  
    tens of thousands of them.  
    She grew up on a sheep and cattle station in NZ.

She will tell you that sheep are  
smelly,  
dirty,  
completely helpless  
(when rain soaked 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  
fundamentally stupid.

But, 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.