

The Fourth Sunday of Easter

Join me if you like:

*“We are poor little lambs who have lost our way, bah, bah, hah
We are little black sheep who have gone astray, bah, bah, bah.*

Or maybe you prefer: “Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep, we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts...

That is from the Rite I confession.

This is often referred to as ‘Good Shepherd Sunday.’

Indeed the Gospel, the psalm and the Collect certainly support that image: I would venture that after the Lord’s Prayer, the 23rd Psalm is probably the passage of scripture that people will know by heart.

The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want...

(heard a golfers version of Psalm 23 --- He maketh thy ball lie in green pastures and not in still waters...

“I am the good shepherd.” So Jesus declares in our gospel today.

If Jesus is a shepherd, I suppose that his followers must be the sheep – isn’t that exactly what the metaphor implies?

Jesus is the good shepherd; we are his sheep.

My guess is -- We generally don’t like to see ourselves as sheep.

We think of sheep as ‘dumb, docile and domestic.’

We think of our selves as sharp, slick and savvy.

There is a tendency then to disregard these agricultural and more primitive examples that Jesus uses. After all, we are a more sophisticated people than the fishermen and farmers that Jesus was talking to. They could relate to examples of sheep and shepherds, seeds and sowing, while we can more easily relate to e-mail, voice mail and virtual examples.

So thinking of ourselves as sheep may be distasteful. We are disdainful of sheep because they are so dependent upon the shepherd that takes care of them. Sheep just move and eat and have their being in flocks – seemingly very docile, seemingly very much alike. We do not find much about that to admire or emulate. So being like sheep is not a positive image for modern Americans.

In our shiny, towering cities, driving our SUVs on freeways and interstates with cell phones permanently attached to our ears, it is often hard for us to relate to this itinerate preacher from the first century of the Common Era.

We also do not care for the image of being a flock – though our congregations are often referred to that way. We really like to see ourselves as individuals – not a part of the herd mentality.

Dr. King Omig writes “Maybe a more apt image of congregational life would be that of a “zoo.” ... Maybe a realistic ad for an open position in a rector-less church would go something on the order of ‘Zookeeper needed at Zechariah’s of the Zoo. Must be able to deal in an effective way with all sorts and conditions of creatures – from cuddly koalas

to temperamental tigers to offended orangutans...” (Synthesis, May 11, 2003)

Something occurs to me about sheep – you don’t find sheep that think they can become shepherds. This is where the metaphor breaks down. I’ll bet that Jesus knew that also. He is talking about people – and people do think that they can call the shots, control the outcomes and ‘do it their way.’

In fact --- “I did it my way” can be called the anthem of the modern era.

Like I said about sheep – they don’t imagine themselves as shepherds.

Shepherds call the shots for sheep – and the sheep like it.

We think of our selves as calling the shots for our lives.

That has always been our problem (Adam and Eve – today.)

Yet for all our disdain, I cannot help but think of that old Ivey League drinking song:

*“We are poor little lambs who have lost our way, bah, bah, hah
We are little black sheep who have gone astray, bah, bah, bah.”*

Gentlemen songsters off on a spree.

Lost from here to eternity

Lord have mercy on such as we ---- bah, bah, bah”

Lord have mercy on such as we -----

**We may be more like sheep than we would like to think.
(Somebody’s market share, client profile, statistic, unit of**

service. --- what we drive, what we wear, what we watch and listen to --- --- there are many who would like to lead us --- who really does lead us?)

Lord have mercy on such as we ----

As many people in recovery from addictions have learned – it was only by turning our lives and our will over to the care of God that we could begin to deal with the lack of control and insanity of our situations.

Or put another way – it is when we realize the need for God – the need for our shepherd Jesus to lead and guide us in this life -- it is then we overcome the illusion that we are in control.

Our shepherd is the gentle provider of love and compassion. Our shepherd, as the gospel says, lays down his very life for us that we might have life and have it abundantly.

Nothing captures it more beautifully than the words to this wonderful hymn.

**Shepherd of souls, refresh and bless
Thy chosen pilgrim flock
With manna in the wilderness,
With water from the rock**

**We would not live by bread alone,
But by thy word of grace,
In strength of which we travel on
To our abiding place**

**Be known to us in breaking bread,
And do not then depart;
Savior, abide with us, and spread**

Thy table in our hearts.

**Lord, sup with us in love divine,
Thy Body and thy Blood,
That living bread, that heavenly wine,
Be our immortal food.**

We are poor little lambs who have lost the way...

Lord have mercy on such as we

**He has
He is
He will**

Shepherd of souls – refresh and bless