

Scripture Readings:

Psalm 23

John 10:11-18

Shepherd of All

Today is Good Shepherd Sunday. The passages are familiar ones. The analogy of Shepherds is used a lot throughout the scriptures. Perhaps it is a bit hard for most of us to relate to this image but we can relate to the message of care and direction we are offered by the shepherd. It's not hard for most of us to acknowledge we sometimes wander away from the right direction. I have preached a lot of sermons on this passage which can make it challenging to come up with something new but something new popped out for me as I read it this week.

I do not think I noticed before Jesus' assertion that "I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd." Have you ever noticed that? Or, more than notice it, have you ever given much thought to its theological implications?

David Lose had the same thing stand out for him this week and so I am pulling out a lot of what he had to say. Lose writes "What strikes me is that, quite simply, Jesus isn't done yet. Despite his healing, despite his preaching, despite all that he had already done and planned to do, Jesus isn't done yet. He still has more sheep to reach, sheep that are not in this fold. By extension, I'd suggest that God isn't done yet, either. And this matters for at least three reasons.

First, God continues to call people from all walks of life, from every nation on the face of the earth, and from each and every generation across the nearly two thousand years since Jesus first uttered those words until today. If that were not true, you and I would not have come to faith and we certainly would not be giving our lives to the task and joy of proclaiming the Gospel."¹

God is at work in our midst in and through us calling us to extend the invitation to abundant life offered by the Good Shepherd. If you have spent any time listening to my messages you know I share and believe that wholeheartedly. I know and believe that God uses you to share abundance, love and grace with one another.

Do you know that simply by praying for someone, offering care for someone or inviting someone to church you very well might be the vessel by which God continues to reach out and embrace God's beloved sheep from beyond this fold? I hold the belief that when John says "For God so loved the world that he sent his only son that...all may have eternal life." he really means all the world, not just western Christianity, or those of us that sit in a pew within the UCC.

¹ <http://www.davidlose.net/2015/04/easter-4-b-god-is-not-done-yet/>

That means “the members who will one day constitute Jesus’ flock are beyond our imagining. There is a tremendous expansiveness to Jesus’ statement here, and we do not know – for neither Jesus nor John tells us – just what are the limits of the fold Jesus describes. All we know is that Jesus – and therefore God – isn’t done yet. Jesus is still calling, God is still searching, and in time we will all be, as Jesus says, one flock under one shepherd.”²

Lose continues “I think this third point is the one that most animates my imagination, because I know more and more people who are worried about friends and family members who no longer go to church, who don’t necessarily identify as Christian anymore, or who have married people of other faiths. And while I don’t think the sermon is the best place to hash out the merits of a universalist versus particularist view of salvation, I do think we can say with confidence that God is not done yet, that God works in ways beyond our imagining to bring together one flock, and that Jesus Christ’s mercy and grace are for all. What makes me bold to proclaim these promises ... is this: Jesus is the Good Shepherd, the one who laid down his life for the sheep – all the sheep! – and who was raised to life once again, validating his sacrifice and promise. Which means, I think, that while we may not know all that God has in mind for those who have followed different paths, I nevertheless trust them all to the mercy and grace of the Good Shepherd.”

I trust that God looks upon all of creation with love, grace and concern. Karoline Lewis writes about how Jesus is the good shepherd. “Jesus is the good shepherd because he the source of abundant life, first to the man born blind, giving him a new existence, new life -- he is a new creation, a child of God (1:1; 12-13). Jesus is the good shepherd because he *finds* the man born blind after the blind man has been thrown out (9:35) which the disciples need to hear because they too will be thrown out (12:42; 16:1-2) and which they need to remember because Jesus found them (1:43). Jesus is the good shepherd because he *knows* his sheep and he calls them by name (Lazarus, 11:43; Mary Magdalene, 20:16). Jesus is the good shepherd because before he goes to the cross, he lays down his life by coming out of the garden, the fold, leaving his sheep protected and safe in the garden, giving himself up (no kiss from Judas) for the sake of his disciples, his sheep (18:4). Jesus is the good shepherd because he will take up his life again in the resurrection AND the ascension, the resurrection being our promise of life here and now (11:25) and the promise of life in our future; the ascension being the abiding place that Jesus prepares for the ones he loves (1:18; 13:23; 14:2).”³

So I wonder who Jesus would be the good Shepherd for today. Folks we may not so easily consider in the folk. What about the immigrant serving you coffee at McDonalds or a donut at Tim Hortons, or that somewhat chaotic barista at Starbucks? Are the folks hanging out at “helping hands” or those asking for money outside the entrance of Save-on-foods a part of the folk Jesus talks about? What about the bank teller, or that guy who just cut you off in traffic? Jesus welcomed everyone.

I think this is something for us to think about as we continue to build towards a time where we connect with community more deeply. I long for this transition to be one where our ministry, outreach, and mission becomes more concrete. Church and Christianity was not built only for

² IBID

³ <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=3590>

those sitting in the pews. As we connect with others let us remember we connect with those loved by God first. It would be easy for us to try and hold on to what is ours and what belongs to only us, but Jesus would call us to openness, love, grace, caring and sharing. As we head towards a season where we are connecting more closely with our Anglican brothers and sisters we are called to the same.

So perhaps this week we might consider some of the anxieties we harbour and concerns we hold regarding those who have left the faith, or seem on the edge of our community, or don't fit our mould. Or some of the fears and anxieties we carry about sharing our ministry and church and not having it be solely our own. Perhaps we might also pray for others more, praying that God would work in us and through us to share the abundant life we've experienced. "But we might also pray that we grow to trust to God the fate of all God's children and sheep simply because of the faith God showed in us by sending the Good Shepherd, the one who lays down his life for us and all people out of nothing other than sheer, abiding, and eternal love. Thanks to be God."

May we be abundant love, grace and acceptance in the days, weeks, months, and years to come.
Amen.