

I Was a Not-So-Good Shepherd

I have a confession to make to you this morning ... I was a not-so-good shepherd when I tried my hand at it ...

- I grew up on a farm in a Kansas community three hours south of Lincoln, just off Highway 77
- We raised cattle and hogs ... animals that respected electric fences and barbed wire... my brothers and I got the job of herding sheep when our father decided to try his hand at raising them ... being the firstborn, I was told I was the head shepherd ...
- I say that I was a failure because I despised sheep as stupid ... they couldn't learn to respect electric fences or barbed wire ...
- Making matters worse, I treated them as cattle to be driven ... rather than leading them ...
- As I look back, I wonder why I didn't remember what I had learned in Psalm 23 ...
 - The Lord *leads* the sheep.
 - The Lord *feeds* the sheep.
 - The Lord *heals* the sheep.
- That was before I heard what the prophet Ezekiel had said ... that the good shepherd searches for the lost sheep, rescues them, gathers them, feeds them, binds up the wounded, strengthens the weak ones.
- And that was before I learned from John's Gospel ... that the Lord leads new sheep into the flock ... without judging how well they fit in.

As we continue to celebrate the Resurrection this fourth Sunday of Easter, we ponder Jesus the Good Shepherd ...

The Good Shepherd, who heals the sick and wounded ...

- In Psalm 23, the Lord pours oil on the sheep's head in order to promote healing ...
- Remember how the Good Samaritan poured oil on the wounds of the injured traveler?

The Good Shepherd, who feeds the sheep ...

- Psalm 23 gives us a glimpse of green pastures, still waters ... and a table

Now ... these images have consoled and comforted countless generations of believers ... especially as we go through difficult times and after the loss of loved ones ...

- But there's more ...

The Good Shepherd is also actively rounding up stray sheep and wounded sheep and sheep fleeing wolves and other predators ...

- Presbyterian pastor Jill Duffield puts it this way: “The good shepherd seeks the lost, lonely, frightened, injured, the baffled, bewildered and shocked. The good shepherd feeds, binds, strengthens. The good shepherd doesn’t assess the sheep’s worthiness, but sees each one’s God-given belovedness.”

And, the table that the Lord sets is not a cozy table in the corner for me and you ... it’s an expandable table ... and the guest list keeps growing ...

- Pastor Duffield continues: “The resolute, reliable, compassionate good shepherd keeps me at the table, the table that I did not set. The table with guests I did not invite. The table laden with overflowing cups I did not fill. The table where the Shepherd gives his body and blood for sinners. The table where Judas (who betrayed him) sat beside Jesus and Peter (who denied him) did, too.”

And that brings us to this morning ...

Jesus, the faithful Good Shepherd, is leading us into the future. As we follow him, let’s keep these three questions in mind:

- What if it’s our job to welcome those other sheep who show up because they know that they need God’s help?
- What if it’s our job just to love them and see that there’s room at the table for them, too?
- What if it’s our job to see that these newcomers have a safe place to heal?

I was not cut out or trained for work as a sheep herder, but that’s OK. I’m glad to be one of the sheep in the flock that the Good Shepherd gathers, heals and feeds.

All authority and power and dominion to the name that is above all names—Jesus Christ our Lord—now and in the age to come. Amen.