

MAY 3, 2020 FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER YEAR A

PRAYER OF ILLUMINATION

Loving God, we pray that your Holy Spirit will strengthen us to be devoted to the teachings of your Word, that through it we may hear your voice and follow it into eternal life. Amen.

John 10:1-10

1“Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit.

2The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep.

3The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

4When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.

5They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.”

6Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

7So again Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep.

8All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them.

9I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture.

10The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

We are Jesus' sheep

According to Rev. Mike Baughman in his reflections for this week he had the opportunity to learn a thing or two about sheep from spending time at his friends' farm and learning from Texas friends who grew up with sheep. Here's what he knows:

1) Sheep are filthy animals, generally covered in mud and their own waste. Their wool can tangle around all sorts of nastiness and hold onto it until the shepherd shows up to get it clean. It's a good thing that Woolite works on wool whether it's in a sweater or still on the sheep. The best shepherds use it before shearing.

2) Lambs bleat a gentle "bahhh." Sheep blurt a disturbing "BLAGHGAGHHAGHAFFTT!!!!!" This has led me to plenty of embarrassing falls as I was so startled by the volume, suddenness, and generally demonic tone of the sound. Sheep start out cute, cuddly, and calming. They rarely stay that way through adulthood.

3) Sheep are either suicidal or stupid—probably both. A West Texas Shepherd, Ed Winton, describes them this way: "Sheep are just born looking for a way to die." He can recall countless stories that involve sheep putting themselves in unnecessary peril, much of which could usually be avoided by doing something simple like turning around.

4) Sheep are hard-wired to follow the sheep in front of them. Sheep do know the voice of the shepherd but will only sometimes follow him or her. They follow other sheep far better than they follow a shepherd. Sometimes, however, sheep will follow a stranger—especially sheep who do not yet know the shepherd well. It takes time

for a shepherd to know sheep well enough to tell them apart. Sheep apparently see us the same way.

*5) Sheep have poor depth-perception and have a hard time distinguishing a partially open gate along a fence line. Unless a gate is wide open, they need a shepherd to lead a couple sheep through. **

We are dirty sheep and our very being tangles to all sorts of undesirable things. We don't ever seem to notice because, our sins grow slowly that we hardly pay attention to what we are do wrong. The shepherd no matter how his sheep behave he still tends to them, they belong to him. In the same way, no matter how we sin, or how much God still tends to us, we still belong to God. Why? God loves us so much that he gave his son to shepherd us to him.*

Like sheep, we startle others, sound worse than we think, and involve ourselves in all sorts of self-destructive behavior that we cannot escape on our own.

*It takes time and attention for the shepherd to know her sheep. I take comfort in the fact that God has taken that time and attention to know us—by name.**

I believe that we, like sheep, have been led astray by thieves and bandits who intend to do harm! The more time the sheep spend with the shepherd, however, the easier it is to identify his distinct voice. In the same way the more time we spend with Jesus, the more we will be able to identify Jesus' voice.*

In verses 7-9. "So again, Jesus said to them, 'Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture.'"

Yes, Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. We find abundant life is found through him, but for whatever reason we, like sheep, seem to have a hard time recognizing the gate when it's right in front of us! We need a God, a shepherd, a gatekeeper to help us find the freedom for which we thirst.

May we humble ourselves and follow the lead of some other sheep who know the shepherd's voice in a different way.

***Note: Text in italics (except Scripture) from Edgy Exegesis, which is glad to offer this week the reflections of a guest columnist, the Rev. Mike Baughman.**

REFLECTION FOR THE WEEK by Molly T. Marshall

*Recovering Shepherding imagery could call the church to simplicity, sacrifice, and solidarity-needed in a time when many have lost their sheep. **

WOW! After reading this reflection, I thought this is happening here and now with the Covid 19 virus. We have been taken out of our church, spending our time in solidarity because of the Stay at Home order. I feel like a shepherd that has lost his sheep. As your “shepherd” my duties as your Pastor is very limited, and that leaves me feeling a little empty.

How has being out of the church for worship service, bible study and fellowship make you feel? wee

RESPONSE

*Consider the shepherd imagery in the texts and the reflection for this week. What new ideas emerge from your experience with this reading? **

***Reflection and Response: Daily Feast Year A**

Meditations from FEASTING on the WORD

(my daily meditation book)

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord my Shepherd,

**Thank you, Lord for all you do for us. Thank you for your creation.
Help us to treat this earth with more respect and love.**

**We as your sheep need you to guide through the gate. Help us Lord,
to follow more in your path.**

**We come to you Lord asking for help for our homeless, they are in
such need of your loving embrace.**

**We ask for you to be with those who are ill with this virus and for all
who are suffering an illness or disease.**

**We pray for our first responders; for the doctors, nurses, police, fire
fighter, for all that work essential jobs so we can stay home safe. We
ask that you watch over them, help them stay healthy.**

**We also pray for our president, for all nations' leaders, for the
governors that they make the right decisions and lead their state in
safe reopening.**

**Lord, watch over all your people, help us stay safe and healthy. We
know that with your love, mercy and grace that we can be safe in
your loving arms.**

In Christ's Name,

Amen

I hope all is well with you and your families. I miss you all very much. Hopefully we can be together in June.

Pastor Karen