

30 April 2023, The Fourth Sunday of Easter: John 10:1-10

Jesus is the true, faithful Good Shepherd and the Gate through which the sheep enter. Jesus said: *The shepherd calls his own sheep by name and leads them out...and (they) follow him because they know his voice...* Clearly, we come into the flock in answering God's call. Jesus calls us to the fellowship of his Body for our salvation, for our transformation into Christ. You are not here because the rest of us are wonderful people (which we are, mostly), or because your needs are met (although they may be) or because you are comfortable here (hopefully true). These things are what the spiritual masters called, "consolations;" but they are not the heart of it. You are at Calvary because you are answering God's call to conversion. God desires us to grow in Christ together, and what can be better for us than desiring what God desires. As we desire God's perfect desire for us, we journey with our true, faithful Good Shepherd.

Jesus' image of shepherd and sheep is more challenging than we might think. Sheep, by nature, do not follow; they are driven, herded. Left alone, sheep wander into all kinds of dimwitted trouble. Our 'sheepiness' is not the herd mentality of the world: desperation for the latest fad. Jesus calls us to hear and follow in a new way. We live by the Shepherd's wisdom and direction. Our desire tunes our ears to the voice of Jesus: we listen attentively for the Shepherd's voice and respond in love, anxious to grow, grateful to serve others.

Jesus says: *...(the sheep) will not follow a stranger...because they do not know the voice of strangers...* Many voices call to us, but we follow the One who lead us to true happiness. Following the Shepherd gives us great joy, even when we have no idea where we are going, or what we are doing. We are never completely fuddled because our purpose is following the Good Shepherd. Jesus surrounds, protects, strengthens, and governs us. Jesus calls us to listen with the ear of the heart and see with the eyes of faith in the present moment, knowing that we are the Shepherd's. As we see God at work in us and around us, we will know true fulfillment and happiness. Joy and thanksgiving are the sure signs of a living faith.

Jesus said: *I came that they might have life and have it abundantly.* All relationships change us. God brings us into this faith community so that God's divine life will transform us. God desires our happiness so much that the Holy Spirit will change everything that hinders our path to God into a way of discipleship. God grows love in us by leading us to those who most need love; God grows forgiveness in us by leading us to people and situations compelling us to be forgiving. God grows patience by giving us opportunities that strengthen forbearance, producing serenity. God grows mercy in us by confronting us with those who most need God's mercy. God leads us to Calvary for our continuing conversion.

God accomplishes this transformation more often through the lives of others. By following our faithful Good Shepherd, we are more converted into him. Faithful Christians expect and desire conversion into Christ above all else and are anxious that others know God's transformation too.

Jesus said: *...(the shepherd) calls his own sheep by name and leads them out... and ...whoever enters by me will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture...* Christians are offerings to God and others; we live with joy and anticipation of God's blessing in the present and future. We do not, figuratively, remain safely in the sheepfold. Indeed, we refuse to stay behind the walls of our own assumptions, opinions, and comforts. Followers of the Good Shepherd are not timid, tepid, or intimidated. We refuse to assume our own experience of Christ is sufficient or complete.

Faith-filled Christians give away God's blessings and yearn to discover new, better ways to give away yet more of God's blessings to others. We do this freely, joyfully because we know God never stops giving graciously to us. As we follow the Good Shepherd there is nothing to fear, and there is no want we suffer that is contrary to God's desires for us. With such confidence in Christ our Good Shepherd, can we not boldly and extravagantly share God goodness?

This is what following the Good Shepherd Jesus look like:

We hear and answer God's call; we celebrate God's goodness; we are changed, converted by God's love; we freely, joyously share God's blessings.

May we always hear his voice and follow.

Blessing and honor, thanksgiving and praise, more than we can offer, more than we can conceive be yours, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, by all angels, all mortals, all creatures, now and for ever. Amen.