

“Counting Sheep”

John 10: 11-18; 22-30

Sometimes, the words of Jesus leap off the pages of Scripture. Sometimes, we can't help but hear those words speak to some current situation, whether they were meant to be heard that way or not.

Such is the case with our lesson from the Gospel according to John this morning. For in the 10th chapter we hear Jesus, say “I am the gate for the sheepfold.” “I call my own sheep by name and lead them out...and find pasture.” A little further on he says, “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand.” Then he speaks what is one of his most beloved sayings, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.”

The parallels to our current crisis are obvious. But, before we speak what we are hearing, let us hear what Jesus is speaking.

For the first thing spoken to hear is this: the creator of life, laid down that life for sheep. Just think of it: the incredibleness of it all. Someone cautioned me the other day about saying that. I was informed that people could take great offence at being called sheep. You know, I actually think that it's the sheep who should be insulted by the comparison. After all, sheep are pretty much content just living and letting live. They're non-violent, like to stick together, and watch out for each other. Judged by human standards, sheep are basically pretty upright creatures.

We're the one's with the issues. We taint everything we inhabit or touch. The Earth knows our abuse: The soil we cultivate, the air we breathe, the water we use, all become polluted by our misuse. Then, even more, there is our collective abuse of each other: We discover a

way to harness the wonderful energy of the atom, and immediately begin building bombs; we discover ways to create cures for various ailments and diseases, and end up profiting from addictive drugs; we create economies of wealth, then engineer them to keep some in poverty. No, it's not the sheep who have the issues; it's us! Yet, the Lord of Life gave his life for creatures who do such things; creatures such as us.

And, that's the first thing spoken that Jesus would have us hear this morning: just how incredible it all is. The Lord of all the universe laid aside the Crown of Glory, for a crown of thorns, and he did it for you and me.

And that leads us to the other thing spoken to hear this morning: Why! Why, he did it. He did it for love; God's love for you and me. Jesus says, "No greater love has anyone than this, but that they lay down their life for another." Jesus went to the cross to show you and me just how far his love would go to win us, to woo us, back to the love of the One who loves us more than life itself. What difference does such love make?

I want us to be careful in how we use Jesus' metaphor here as we look at our current condition of pandemic. It is true though that Jesus' language is language that speaks to our condition. We are unable to gather here together in the fold of our Sanctuary. We are attempting to stay safe within the folds of our homes from that which does kill and destroy. We are uncertain of what outside our folds is a pasture of life or a trap of death. We long for that One who will call us by name, whose voice we know, and will safely lead us out to find abundant pasture, and not lose a single one of us.

Jesus' words here startle us, capture our attention because of our longing, even though we know that they are not specifically about this

condition. Perhaps though, that currency of his language to our current condition, will speak to you and me of just how important your life is to Jesus, to God.

Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep." Because Jesus has laid down his life for the sheep, we have been changed. You are now Jesus' sister; you are now his brother. We are all God's son's and daughters. Love: that's why Jesus did it; Love for you and love for me.

You are part of Jesus' own fold, a lamb of his flock, a sheep of his pasture. No matter how much this current crisis may strive and conspire to isolate you, to make you feel culled apart from the flock, this is still your fold. Stay connected! Keep pasturing here. Beside this and the weekday services, and the Daily Devotional, and the Adult Forum , and Children's Chapel, there are opportunities for social gatherings as well; in fact, make sure that you log in for the Coffee fellowship right after this service. Let your face be seen among the faces of those who long to see yours.

And, One thing more: Right now, even though you're worshipping here online, in your mind's eye, look about this sanctuary, this fold of God. Picture it. See all the people you would normally see here near you. Picture them. Now start counting. Count everyone you see! Count your sisters. Count your brothers. And, count yourself in God's fold, and loved!