



DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

The Fourth Sunday of Easter (A) – 1 Peter 2:19-25

Focus: *Return to the Shepherd*

word of life

“He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.” (1 Peter 2:24-25 NRSV)

Read 1 Peter 2:19-25

The Fourth Sunday of Easter is known as Good Shepherd Sunday. All the lectionary texts for this particular Sunday reference God as the Good Shepherd. The well-loved Psalm 23 is read, chanted, or sung by choirs. Listeners are reminded to hear and heed the voice of a shepherd who cares, nurtures, and protects. Not everyone appreciates being compared to a smelly sheep needing protection. It goes against our independent way of being. But that is why the imagery and message of Good Shepherd Sunday resonates so deeply.

The passage from in 1 Peter 2:19-25 includes a reference to the shepherd—one who invites us to return for protection. For we are too often like sheep who have gone astray, wandering away from the safety of the shepherd’s care in order to explore other pastures. Like sheep, we too often focus only on what is in front of us, and we fail to see impending danger around us.

1. *How are we like sheep needing a shepherd?*
2. *What makes us different from sheep?*

There is a no doubt that Christians need the care of the Good Shepherd of Jesus Christ, for life is not just a green pasture with still waters. Storms come. We follow an innocent man named Jesus who suffered on the cross, but who kept on loving those who caused his suffering. We follow a servant of God who gave his life in order to bear our sins. “He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness...” (1 Peter 2:24 NRSV)

3. *Is giving one’s life typical of good shepherds? How so?*
4. *What might a bad shepherd do in time of danger?*

When it comes to suffering, what meaning is there in suffering when it is a just punishment for our wrongdoing? We read in the First Letter of Peter, “If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God’s approval. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps.” (1 Peter 2:20-21 NRSV)

It is difficult to hear that we might be called into suffering—despite our innocence. That’s not the path most of us would choose to travel. That’s not the road most of us would choose to experience. And yet, we can endure pain and suffering and still have hope and courage. For we have an example in Christ of how to suffer without seeking revenge or threatening attacks.

5. *What words and images do you associate with the suffering of Jesus?*
6. *What can we learn from Jesus about suffering—though he was innocent?*

“By his wounds you have been healed.” (1 Peter 2:24 NRSV) Those are powerful words for us to hear not just on Good Shepherd Sunday, but every day of our lives. A good shepherd is willing to risk his or her life and bodily harm to protect the flock. We have a good shepherd in Jesus Christ who willingly suffered and died for us.

Word among us

The pre-school children jumped to their feet to sing their favorite song: “*I just want to be a sheep. Baaaa! I just want to be a sheep. Baaaa!*” Most of the children had probably never seen or touched a sheep. If so, they might not be so thrilled to claim their identity as sheep. After a while, they might tire of wandering around pastures eating. They might yearn for television, games, friends and family.

1. *What (if anything) sounds appealing to you about being a sheep?*
2. *What is it like to have a shepherd to watch over you, protect you, and make sure you have adequate food and water?*

You don’t hear many adults singing that song, “*I just want to be a sheep. Baaaa!*” That is not a goal we aspire to in our lives. But maybe we should reconsider that childhood song and adopt it as a personal mantra. We might gain a clearer understanding of our need for Jesus to shepherd us. We might more easily confess our straying to distant pastures where there is no shepherd to care for us.

3. *Take a moment to consider what it would mean for you to more like a sheep.*
4. *How do we stray away from the shepherd of Jesus Christ?*
5. *What does it usually take to return to the Good Shepherd?*

The word *sheep* is both singular and plural – there is one or many. All sheep need basic care, whether there is a solitary lamb or a whole flock. All are need of a shepherd.

faith practice in daily life

Live among God’s faithful people

Life is more than having someone take care of us. The writer of the First Letter of Peter clearly describes the possibility of pain and suffering—though we are innocent. If that is the case, we dare not choose to be alone going through tribulation. We need the encouragement of others—others who have also suffered in the name of Christ—to remind us of our unique calling. “For to this you have been called...” (1 Peter 1:21 NSRV)

As children we often dream of our future; usually it does not include being a sheep. We dream of fame, wealth, relationships, and the list goes on. As we grow in faith, we learn to see our lives in terms of God’s calling us to be sheep of the Good Shepherd. Sometimes, when we experience pain and suffering, our calling in life is not always so clear. But in those times, we have the promise of the Good Shepherd who gave his life for the sheep.

6. *Take a moment to reflect on the phrase, “For to this you have been called...” To what have you been called by God?*
7. *Do you know someone who has been called into suffering? How might you support that person in his or her journey?*

In Christ, our wounds have been healed. In Christ, we have found a Good Shepherd – or better said, the Good Shepherd has found us. Thanks be to God!

Prayer

Good Shepherd, when we go astray, bring us home; when we are wounded, heal us; and when we suffer, be present and remind us of your suffering for us. Amen

last word

Each day this week offer this prayer, “I just want to be a sheep. Baaa!”

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