

Acts 2:42-47
John 10:1-10

OUR SHEPHERD

Did you notice how important breaking bread is among the disciples after Jesus left them?

Yet our scripture teachings remind us that Jesus never really leaves his own.

He is our shepherd, and we are the sheep of his pasture.

We know his voice, and he knows every one of us.

Like every good shepherd, he is also the protector of his sheep.

When we are gathered in the fold, he lies down across the opening to be the gate that bars the way to keep any sheep from escaping and to keep any tangible enemy from entering to prey on us.

We generally don't like being called sheep, particularly since they are stupid animals,

but it's important to remember how important sheep were to the economy of many households throughout the Bible.

Just two examples of shepherds chosen by God are Moses, who fell in love with a sheep-herder's daughter and

became a shepherd himself until God called him back to Egypt to lead his people to deliverance,

and David, who was a shepherd until God sent the prophet Samuel to anoint him, just a boy, as Israel's king.

As God's sheep, we love, respect and rely on our heavenly shepherd.

Think about this: the most popular and best known of all 150 Psalms is the 23rd, which begins, “The LORD is my shepherd...”

In chapter 2 of 1st Peter, we are reminded that we have been healed by the wounds borne by Jesus, because, Peter says, “you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.”

Our gospel reading is very clear about how one honestly gets into the Lord’s sheepfold: only by the gate, which is the shepherd himself.

Jesus tells his listeners that anyone who tries to sneak over the fence to get to the sheep is “a thief and a bandit”.

But the sheep will only follow their shepherd, and if a stranger tries to step in to lead them away, they will run because they don’t know his voice.

Jesus explains even more clearly that he is the gate for the sheep.

All who preceded him were thieves and bandits, he says, but the sheep wisely ignored them.

Jesus repeats, with emphasis, “I am the gate for the sheep.

Whoever enters by me will be saved” and come and go with blessings.

Jesus reminds his listeners that he came so that all who follow him may have life and have it abundantly.

He provides the green pastures, the clear water, the shelter and safety that his sheep require.

There is no reason to be afraid, even when, in a time like now, we walk through a dark valley, because our Lord is with us.

His shepherd’s crook is a symbol of his leadership and

of his eternal love for every one of us.

Like the shepherd in a parable he told, Jesus would leave the 99
to go in search of the one who is missing,
and tenderly carry it back on his shoulders,
to restore the entire flock.

When we tell people the gospel story, we know some will shrug,
shake their heads, and dismiss us as foolish for believing as we do.
Yet we know that every person who hears or reads the gospel story
is now more available to the Holy Spirit to reach them
with the truth they need to know in order to receive salvation.

We are grateful that our Lord trusts us with the mission
of spreading the gospel, so more and more new sheep
can be brought into the fold with us.

God's Kingdom is coming, but it is not yet here.

We still have time and opportunities to spread God's promises,
and to tell people how we ourselves have been blessed
by the realization of those promises.

We pray:

Wherever we are, Lord,

We know we are together, united in faithful prayer.

We thank you, we glorify you, we worship you,
and we count on you, especially during these devastating times,
to bless us with continuing faith and health.

In your precious name we pray,

Amen.