
My Sermon from Sunday April 25, 2021 Easter 4, 'Good Shepherd Sunday' ~

"Do You Wanna Be A Sheep?"

I speak to you in the name of the Good Shepherd. Amen.

Every 4th Sunday of Easter is known as "Good Shepherd Sunday" and today we hear the words of that most beautiful psalm, Psalm 23.

Here is Psalm 23 in the timeless language of the [King James Bible](#)

- ¹ The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.***
- ² He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.***
- ³ He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.***
- ⁴ Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.***
- ⁵ Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.***
- ⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.***



Here are some other verses in scripture about the shepherd and sheep.

"We are the people of God's pasture and the sheep of his hand."

"Do not be afraid, little flock."

"The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep."

"The sheep follow the shepherd because they know his voice."

Jesus tells parables in which you and I are identified as the sheep and God is the shepherd. For example, the ***Parable of The Lost Sheep***. The shepherd is always imaged as a metaphor for God, as kind and good and compassionate and caring. The sheep are expected to be loyal and follow the shepherd, as the sheep know his voice.

In the Bible, the sheep are considered to be the good animal and the goats the sinful, uncaring animals. Which is kind of too bad for goats . . . But my focus this morning is on sheep.

In everyday life, shepherds, like the Bible references, are considered to be giving and caring people. The words of Psalm 23 have been carried into the world. A shepherd is a servant leader who never lets go of the people they are serving. They put the interest of the group task ahead of a need for power or control. Shepherds are servant leaders. This is a good thing. I am thankful that God's image as a shepherd remains a positive image out in the world.

Sadly, the metaphor of sheep representing people does not have a good image out in the world. This makes it difficult for us to decide that we wish to be God's sheep. We have to jump from one end of the spectrum to the other, from the secular view into the biblical view.

Sheep are considered to be not very smart. A person who is called a "sheep" is a person who mindlessly follows others and has no initiative or imagination. We are told not to engage in 'herd behaviour' and if we are managers or leaders, to not think of the people we lead as our 'flock.' This type of thinking is believed to undermine our potential.

In George Orwell's book *Animal Farm*, the sheep are easily led and have the lowest intelligence of all the animals at the farm. If we call someone a 'sheep,' it is considered to be an insult.

Research studies have been done by psychologists in order to determine our herd behavior, which is not endearing. We imitate other people's behaviour. For example, in one study, a group of people joined a crowd and these pre-selected people were told to gaze up into the sky. Within just a few seconds, hundreds of people around them started to gaze up into the sky. In another study, planted people stood up in a dentist's office whenever they heard a bell ring. Soon, everyone was standing up every time the bell rang, and that behaviour continued even when all the planted people left the room.

On the other end of the spectrum, when Jesus refers to us as sheep, he knows a lot about sheep and what you and I are called to do as believers. And these are beautiful spiritual teachings.

Sheep have no survival skills and if released into the wild they will not survive. **They are totally dependent upon the shepherd.** The sheep do learn the voice of the shepherd and how to follow him. As Christians, we are dependent upon our Good Shepherd, the risen Christ, and we learn to recognize his voice and to follow it.

Let's examine some additional characteristics of sheep a little more closely and explore why this image is used so much in the Bible and why sheep are mentioned over 500 times. And maybe this will make us **WANNA BE A SHEEP!**



Sheep will imitate others. This is a good thing if we are trying to do the right action and to imitate Christ. However, did you know that if a rope is tied a little bit off the ground before sheep are let out of a gate, the sheep at the front will naturally jump over the rope? If the rope is cut, the remaining sheep will continue to jump even though they don't need to.

Sheep can't get up without help. If a sheep is on its back, it cannot stand back up without the shepherd's help. When a sheep is injured, the sheep needs the help of a shepherd to bind its wounds and to get better. God heals the broken-hearted and raises us up on eagles' wings.

Sheep are not pack animals that carry burdens, like an ox or a camel or a donkey. We are to give our

Burdens to God and God will carry them for us.

"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28

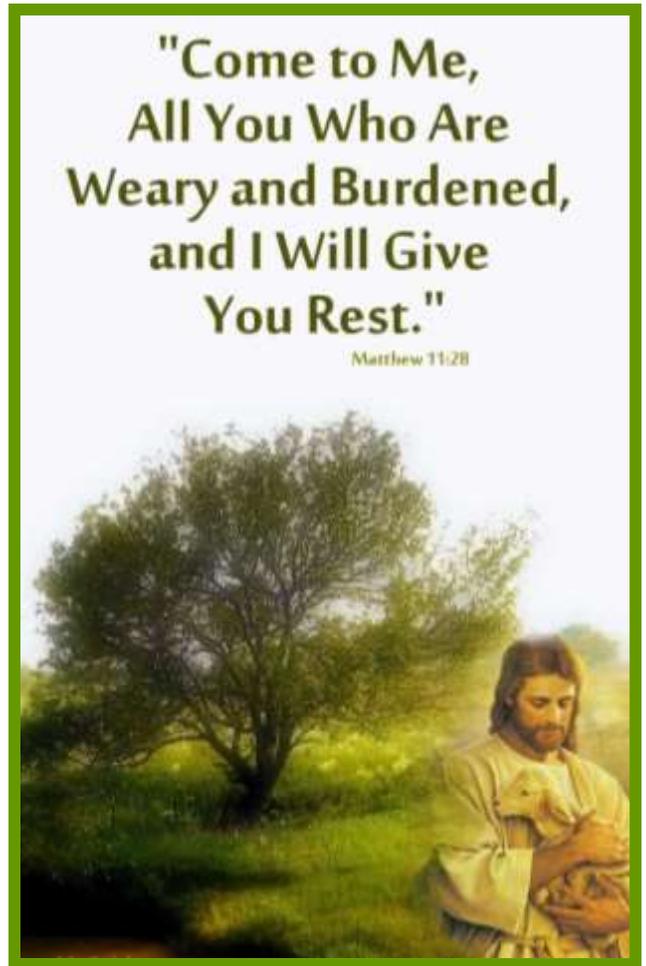
After his trials, Job regained his prosperity and that included 14,000 sheep. Sheep are valuable just as you and I are precious in God's sight.

Lambs are considered to be innocent symbols of God's love. Jesus is referred to as the *"Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world."* Redemptive, sacrificial love is signified by the lamb.

It is clear that the biblical image of a sheep is appropriate for our growth and development as disciples of the good shepherd. How then do we blend that positive image with the negative image of the sheep presented by the world? We begin by acknowledging that the image is truly different between the biblical world and the secular world and we get it. Next, we focus on the attributes of a sheep which tie us to the embrace of our loving God, a God who cares for us, nurtures us, watches out for us, and encourage us to listen to his voice and to follow him.

I want God to never stop searching for me when I drift away from him . . .

I want God to carry my burdens and to raise me up when I can't do it on my own . . .



I want to recognize the voice of the Good Shepherd and to follow him . . .

That is the kind of sheep I wanna be.

"He will feed his flock like a shepherd. He will gather the lambs in his arms."
Isaiah 40:13

Amen.

Archdeacon Deborah+
