

Fourth Sunday of Easter Year B

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The image of the shepherd is one of the most prolific and powerful images of Christianity, a symbol of God's protectiveness and care. And it is about as old as our oldest stories, going back to the Hebrew Bible and the calling of David to be the king of Israel up to the shepherds watching their flocks by night. If there is a psalm that is more popular than the 23rd, which is all about the shepherds rod and staff comforting us, I would say that I've been lied to for much of my life.

So yeah, shepherds are a big deal for us Christians. And I don't know about you, but whenever I hear of Shepherds and specifically of the good Shepherd from our Gospel today, I think of Jesus, this heroic shepherd figure that guides lost sheep. What I hear less about is the other side of the equation. Namely, that we good Christian people are in fact, sheeple. Well... sheep.

I at least don't really focus on my being a sheep when I read these things. I might find comfort in that notion that Jesus goes after every single sheep and think about how we're all known and loved by Christ, but I really prefer to focus on that rather than my being a sheep. Because at least as far as I can tell, if someone calls you a sheep these days, I don't think they're giving you a compliment. The Modern take people being like sheep is that its not very good. As a sheep, you have no mind of your own, no agency, you simply follow a party line.

Now, given that fact and the ideas of being Christlike that get made it about in our faith, I at least way more frequently identify with trying to be like a shepherd, not a sheep. There's a desire to be more like the person who has the most agency in the story, and that isn't the sheep in our parables.

And this isn't a new phenomenon. Whatever I think about this, I think about this tradition in Victorian Protestantism of the manly Jesus. And this is totally a thing. It's like there was a push to make Jesus out to be kind of like Arnold Schwarzenegger so that more men would be into church. There are legit arguments from the time about how manly Jesus was because he was the sort of guy that was buff and manly. Like the argument do you know how much a lamb weighs or a sheep weighs and how hard it would be to carry it on your back through mountains like Jesus?

And you know what job he had? He was a carpenter, like a man! There's a great meme but it's an image of Jesus being like John Cena, Dwayne The Rock, Johnson, levels of swole and muscles and him just flexing and breaking the cross in half.

If you can't tell, I invest very little in this Victorian notion that Jesus called us to be manly men. Which is not to say that the virtues of caring for one's body common learning skills to build and create, and to help others are bad. Quite the contrary. I think that Jesus is life is a model by which we all listen to the vocation in ourselves that can go out and make this world all the better. But today I'm wary of identifying more with the Good Shepherd than with the sheep.

I think this Gospel is a reminder to humility. Don't worry that I'm saying we should think we're powerless and should just wait for God to solve our problems because we're powerless sheep. There are plenty of passages in scripture that call us to remember our power, not the least of which is coming up in May. Jesus ultimately after his death, and in Pentecost says look the mission of bringing about God's kingdom is our mission too, we have work to do, and we have the power to do it.

But today let's remember, not a single one of us is God. A lot of Christ is in each one of us, we are the body of Christ, but, and please let me know if I ever say anything different because if I do, run from the church as fast as you possibly can, but I am not God. Neither are any of you.

We say that only one man ever was and is. Only one man who is that shepherd. And the end of the day? We are sheep. And you know what? God bless it. I hope we can be PROUD of our sheepiness. Let us be proud of our tiny hooves and our sheep wool. Let us be proud that, even though we can get lost, or confused, or scared, we cannot help but boldly explore this world in its abundance. Let us proudly remember that we are just as valuable as every other sheep to the Good Shepherd, that when we are at our lowest that we are always loved and that when we think we're powerful and all that and a bag of potato chips that we're no more special or loved than those around us. As naturally as sheep live each day, let us so too live out that nature embedded in each of us to love one another as Jesus loved us.