

Kuhn Memorial Presbyterian Church
Barboursville, West Virginia
May 3, 2020
Good Shepherd Sunday

Call to Worship

Satisfy us with your love in the morning,
and we will live this day in joy and praise.

Prayer

We have seen your glory, O God,
and we have witnessed your mighty acts.
By your Holy Spirit, put your voice in our mouths,
fill our arms with your strength,
and warm our hearts with your love.
Then we will be worthy disciples of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Scripture Readings Psalm 23; John 10:1-10

“Baa! Baa!” Driving inland from Ireland’s west coast, we passed through some small villages. The roads were unfamiliar and narrow, and we were driving on the “wrong” side of the road. If that weren’t complicated enough, occasionally we would have to move out of the way so a tractor could pass. And, to our surprise, the road was dotted with woolly pedestrians- sheep. They seemed unaware of us and impending danger. We were so close we could easily bump them or worse.

“Baa! Baa!” On closer inspection, we noticed each was wearing a bright color painted on his rump. Green or blue. Turns out it was vegetable dye, kind of like we use for dyeing Easter eggs. This is how the flocks are identified. The green ones belong to one farm, the blue ones to another. For awhile, it was novel and amusing. But, eventually, dodging sheep lost its charm. The truth is they require a lot of care. They tend to go their own ways with no logical sense of direction. They get mixed up and follow their mates into neighboring pastures. They act on their own appetites. And, they really don’t know when to get in out of the rain. And sometimes they are roadkill.

On subsequent trips, we have discovered the art of sheep-herding using trained sheep-dogs. Equipped with a whistle and a few vocal signals, the shepherd gives commands to the sheep-dog who works the flock into an organized troupe, moving them around the pastures, down by the cool, clear streams, up on the rocky hills, and back to their pen. The shepherd and his dog are of critical importance to the life and health of each sheep.

Sheep are important in that place. Textile art- like sweaters, caps, and blankets- plays a significant role in the Irish economy. And, yes, I'm told lamb makes for a hearty stew. (When it's on the menu, I order the fish and chips!)

In John's gospel, Jesus announces who he is through a series of "I am" passages. He says, "I am the good shepherd" and, "I am the gate." He clearly identifies with the role of care-giver. It is an all-consuming task. It is a life of relationship. Jesus says he and his flock are so familiar with one another that his sheep hear and respond to his voice.

Imagine for a moment that you are one of the flock and you have climbed up one of the craggy hills looking for something tasty to nibble. You lingered too long and you find yourself alone under a dark sky. It is growing cold. Which way is home? You hear water, but it is not the sound of the stream that gently runs over rocks near your pen, but the loud, crashing water of the ocean. You turn your head this way and that. Your heart starts to pound in fear. You cry for help. "Baa! Baa! Baa!"

And then you hear a voice. The voice that has called you to breakfast, the voice that asks for your wounded foot so that it may be washed and treated, the voice that urges you to stick together this time, lest you become lunch for a predator, the voice that calls you back to the fold each night, where you may lay down your head and rest. The voice that says, "Welcome home."

Hymn My Shepherd Will Supply My Need (Psalm 23)
My shepherd will supply my need; Jehovah is his name.
In pastures fresh he makes me feed, beside the living stream.
He leads my wandering spirit back, when I forsake his ways.
And leads me for his mercy's sake, in paths of truth and grace.

When I walk through the shades of death, your presence is my stay.
One word of your supporting breath drives all my fears away.
Your hand in sight of all my foes, does still my table spread.
My cup with blessings overflows; your oil anoints my head.

The sure provisions of my God attend me all my days.
O may your house be my abode, and all my work be praise.
There would I find a settled rest, while others go and come.
No more a stranger or a guest, but like a child at home.
Glory to God, Westminster John Knox Press

Prayers of the Faithful and the Lord's Prayer

Gracious God, shepherd of our lives,
we come to you with thanksgiving.
You are our provider and sustainer.
You transform our weary souls with your grace, wisdom, and love.
You bless us each day with glimpses of resurrection and the promise of new life-
in signs of spring, in stories of kindness, and help in our distress.
Tender Shepherd, we bring before you now our prayers for others...
for all who are struggling with illness, loneliness, sadness, or grief;
for those diagnosed with or recovering from Coronavirus, and all the issues that accompany this
disease;
for those who have lost income and other measures of security;
for those who must decide when and how to return to work and resume other activities;
for those who are victims of hatred and prejudice, ridicule, or scorn;
for messengers of peace and healing, hope and reconciliation;
for your Church and all faithful people here and around the world.
Lord of mercy, hear our prayers.
We lift our hearts and voices in the prayer Jesus taught us, saying, Our Father...Amen.

Blessing

May God lead you in paths of rest and renewal on this Sabbath day;
may Christ Jesus accompany you on this week's journey;
and may the Holy Spirit fill your heart with joy and generosity.
Go now in peace, to love and serve the Lord. Amen.