

Connecting with the Sunday Readings

Fourth Sunday of Easter Gospel Word
John 10:11-18

The Gospel according to John uses rich images to describe who the Risen Christ is. He describes Jesus as the Bread of life (John 6:35), Living Water (John 4:14), the Resurrection and the Life (John 11:23). One of the most treasured descriptions of Jesus is the one found in today's Gospel reading. He is the Good Shepherd. The image of the Good Shepherd is a rich reminder of God's constant presence and care for all of us. We have no biblical evidence that Jesus, himself, was a shepherd, but in his travels throughout the countryside he probably observed their life and work.

A shepherd's life was a watchful, caring one. The shepherd had to be continually on guard for those who might steal his sheep. He had to be constantly vigilant that the sheep did not wander off, lose their way, or be attacked by wolves. Shepherding was a sometimes-dangerous twenty-four hour job. It could also be heroic in circumstances where a shepherd might even have to lay down his life for his sheep. Of course, this is exactly what Jesus did for us.

Anyone who devotes himself or herself to the care of others steps into the arena of a demanding life. And caring for others constitutes the core of family life. There are financial difficulties and the everyday challenges of getting along. Those who care for aging parents or for disadvantaged children know all too well the "burden" of family life. Just like Jesus, in family we can all be good shepherds for each other.

—by David Thomas, PhD, Co-Director, The Bethany Family Institute

Living the Word

There is a certain amount of comfort in today's Gospel reading. No matter what circumstances we may be living in, most of us experience stress, anxiety and fear from time to time. We live in a dangerous world, a world filled with uncertainties. We know that stress and anxiety can cause all kinds of life draining challenges. It can drain us of enthusiasm and joy in life. It can cause serious health problems. It can set us at odds with the people we most need to care about. In those times, the image of the Risen Christ as the Good Shepherd can become a source of hope and healing for us.

Sometimes it's good for us to step back and see the big picture of our lives; to reflect on those times that we have experienced the presence of the Good Shepherd leading us in the right direction; to put the pieces of our lives together as if we are working with a jigsaw puzzle. Just as sheep are connected to their shepherd, we are connected to the Risen Christ, too.

We find the presence of God in one another and we are the Body of Christ here on this Earth. So there is another side to reflecting on the image of the Good Shepherd: we are also called to shepherd each other. Think about the people you know who could use words of encouragement and understanding. Is there someone for whom you can lay your life down this week, perhaps a child who needs some of your time, or a co-worker who would benefit from your going the extra mile to help them out?

One-line Prayer

The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not
fear.
Amen.