

**II EASTER 2014**  
**SERMON - CHRIST CHURCH PARISH**  
**FATHER CRAIG LOONEY**  
***1 PETER 2.19 ST. JOHN 10.11***



Sheep...confesses author and church pastor Gary Richmond...are not his favorite animals...but they seem to be God's most favorite...they are mentioned more than 500 times in the Bible...more than any other animal.

Mr. Richmond has first-hand knowledge about sheep and talks about his experiences as a zookeeper and veterinary assistant at the Los Angeles Zoo in his book All God's Creatures: Spiritual Lessons from the Animals of the Bible, which has been called "a delightful, inspirational safari through Scripture".

Zookeepers, according to Mr. Richmond, don't like to take care of sheep, because they consider it a kind of punishment, when there are lions, tigers, bears, gorillas and more exotic animals to take care of, even the black leopard that got loose from its cage one day and almost cost him his life.

But sheep do need someone to take care of them because they are very good at getting themselves into trouble. They are easily spooked...when one sheep starts running they all start running...in different directions...away from the protection the shepherd and sheep pen provide them. Left unattended, sheep can become the perfect example of mob mentality.

The Bible is full of stories about sheep and shepherds. Abel was the first shepherd and sadly the first murder victim. When Moses was demoted from his important position within the royal family of Egypt, he spent the next forty years taking care of sheep in a foreign country. David was the youngest brother left to take care of the sheep while his older brothers went off to fight a war...and he would later write a hymn and call the Lord his Shepherd.

Isaiah wrote that all of us are like sheep that are lost, each going his own way, and getting into trouble. Jeremiah wrote that we are like sheep that have gotten lost and can't find our way home. God spoke to Ezekiel and told him he himself would go looking for his sheep to take care of them and bring them together again. God would not let his sheep stay lost; he would make sure they were home safe. God has been providing shepherds all along to take care of his people...we just need to stop running and listen to the Shepherd's call. We call today "Good Shepherd Sunday" because of the shepherd images in both the Epistle and Gospel readings. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who is always looking after his sheep, to keep them safe and out of harms way. He is the Shepherd of David's Psalm 23 always giving us strength, and we shall want for nothing.

People are not sheep, but we too can wander off and get ourselves into trouble. We have free will...we have the ability to make choices...good choices...bad choices. We can either choose to do the right thing...or the wrong thing. We can do those things that are pleasing to God...or not. We can try to make it on our own, and stay lost. Not an attractive prospect! Or we can ask for God's help. That's a better choice!

People are also not sheep because we don't operate by pure instinct. Sheep only know they feel safe when they are being protected by the person who cares for them, where wild wolves can't reach them and hurt them. We have the God-given intelligence to see there is a way out of our sins and troubles and God gives us the help we need to do something about it. We can turn around and come back to Jesus the Good Shepherd.

Jesus is more than just a shepherd. He is THE Good Shepherd, who was willing to give up his life for the sheep he loves. There is no other Shepherd like him. He does exactly what God told Ezekiel he himself would do. He is the Good Shepherd who comes looking for us when we get lost, when we wander off and get ourselves into trouble, when we sin and cut ourselves off from his love and from other people. Jesus never gives up on us. He is the One who calls us each by name to return to the safety of the flock.

Gary Richmond observed sheep in the zoo being washed and kept clean by their caretakers. In their natural environment, sheepskin secretes lanolin, which helps keep the sheep cool, but is a magnet for dirt. Sheep get a bath to stay clean. When we get ourselves dirty by saying and doing the wrong things, we confess our sins and ask God to forgive us and we get cleaned.

Sometimes we act like sheep running away and getting lost. Let's stop running away and listen...and answer the call to come home to Jesus the Good Shepherd, the Keeper of our souls.

