

## II EASTER 2019

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

I PETER 2.19-25 ST. JOHN 10.11-16

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*"You were like sheep that had lost their way, but now you have been brought back to follow the Shepherd and Keeper of your souls".*

Church Pastor and author Gary Richmond in his book *All God Creatures: Spiritual Lessons from the Animals of the Bible* admits he doesn't much care for sheep. But, Mr. Richmond writes, they must be God's favorite animals...sheep are mentioned more than 500 times in the Bible.

Sheep need shepherds to take care of them. Abel is the first shepherd we meet in the Bible. Moses and David were shepherds. David wrote about half of the Psalms...perhaps the most famous is Psalm 23..."The Lord is my Shepherd; I have everything I need."

Angels announced the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem to shepherds who were taking care of their sheep and came to see their Savior. We place figures of shepherds and sheep in the Crèche on Christmas Day to remind us Jesus first appeared to shepherds...the Magi came later.

The shepherds of Jesus' time worked for the farmers who actually owned the sheep. They were supposed to keep them safe from wolves and other animals that might harm them. Farmers had a vested interest in the welfare of their sheep. Some shepherds loved the sheep and worked hard to protect them. Other shepherds ran off when a wolf showed up...leaving the sheep to fend for themselves.

The Epistle and Gospel readings have to do with sheep and shepherds...giving today its unofficial name..."Good Shepherd Sunday". In the Gospel Jesus calls himself *the Good Shepherd*...not a good shepherd...**THE Good Shepherd**. There is no other shepherd that takes care of his sheep the way Jesus does...and we are the sheep. In Psalm 95 we proclaim "He is our God; we are the people he cares for, the flock for which he provides."

Anyone who has seen sheep in their natural environment quickly learns they are not the cute cuddly creatures posing for photographs at the Zoo. They are messy, not too smart,

and when they get spooked run in every direction. No one sheep says, "Follow me and I'll lead you to safety." But the sheep do know the good shepherd's call and will follow him home to the safety of the sheep pen.

We sometimes act like lost sheep...we can run off in all directions and create messy lives for our selves and others. We're trying to find our way home and we need help getting there. Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd who is watching out for us...he knows us and we know him...and we respond to his call. In the Book of Ezekiel, God identifies himself as the Good Shepherd, "I myself will look for my sheep and take care of them...I will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will find them a place to rest."

Jesus is the Good Shepherd because he was willing to go beyond what an ordinary shepherd would or could do. Jesus was willing to give up his life for us and put us back in a right relationship with God.

Jesus helps us get through tough times, because he's been through it all. When we find ourselves in situations where we are being treated unfairly...we should follow Peter's advice in the Epistle...we can't lash out at those people who are hurting us. We need to remind ourselves we are the sheep who follow Jesus the Good Shepherd and we don't want to wander off and get ourselves into more trouble.

The Apostles were the first bishops of the Church and they too were shepherds. In John's Gospel, Jesus tells Peter three times to feed his sheep. Jesus is telling Peter and the other Apostles to tend, care for and spiritually nourish the people...from the youngest (lambs) to full-grown (sheep). Your bishops and priests are your shepherds...in a direct line of Succession from the Apostles...here to love and cherish and teach and take care of their greatest treasure...the sheep.

The next time we're at the zoo or visiting a farm and have the chance to spend time looking at sheep...we should think about Jesus the Good Shepherd watching over us and keeping us safe. And we should remember...

...We were like sheep that had lost our way, but now we have been brought back to follow the Shepherd and Keeper of our souls.

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