

BLESSINGS ALWAYS

April 21, 2021

Association Minister Message

Rev. Daniel L. Busch

"SHEPHERDING." "The Lord is my shepherd." (Psalm 23:1) "I am the good shepherd." (John 10:13). This Sunday is Shepherd Sunday. Biblical writers use the image of shepherd as a leader, a guide, protector and a provider. *"SHEPHERDING"* is a description of a care-giver.

Sheep. Gentle, but not the brightest animal. Followers, not leaders. Sheep will follow one another even over a cliff. They also can be unkind to another sheep and will shun another sheep by keeping that animal out of their fold. Sheep will not drink from a pool of water if it is not *"still"*; thus a shepherd *"leads me beside still waters"* so that life is refreshed. Another image comes to mind, not about sheep, but when things are out of control, *"It's like herding cats."* Sheep versus cats: supposedly dependent versus fiercely independent.

We, like sheep, have gone astray or are being led astray. We can be oblivious to what is around us. Jesus calls us to find in ourselves those gifts and graces that allow us to care for one another and bring unity of spirit with and to one another. Today's news reports stories of lack of care for others and greed and selfishness that prioritizes *"my"* wellbeing. During this pandemic, it has been difficult to care for one another because we struggle to survive ourselves, fearing being exposed to COVID and neglecting being empathetic to others. Shunning is practiced, and yet, like sheep, we are so careless that we follow someone or something into a dangerous/unhealthy situation or deny there is a problem.

Jesus declares Himself to be the *"good shepherd,"* not just shepherd or *"the"* shepherd (or even bad shepherd). There are shepherds who have the job just for the money and are not invested in the well-being of the sheep. They are just doing the job without caring for the sheep. Jesus cares, loves and is an advocate for the sheep (us). Comparing us to sheep may not be the best image and that is exactly why we need the shepherd Jesus to call us from going over the cliff and destroying ourselves. We may be shunned by those around us but Jesus embraces us. *SHEPHERDING* is what Jesus does and calls and affirms us to live as persons created in the image of God. The *"good shepherd"* (Jesus) will sacrifice Himself for His flock and Easter's message proclaims new life that overcomes all that would make us less than what God created us to be. Jesus declares, *"I know my own sheep and they know me..."* We are loved so that we can love and experience the resurrection power that overcomes all that would destroy us and the creation. *"May you love so much that you love nothing else too much. May you fear God so much that you need fear nothing else at all."* BLESSINGS ALWAYS.