

## Shepherds in Many Places

Acts 9:36-43; Revelation 7:9-17; John 10:22-30; Psalm 23 4-29-07

As most of you know, I went back to Wisconsin for the marriage of my middle daughter, Jennifer, on April 21. She is the last of my three daughters to marry; the other two are celebrating their tenth anniversaries this year.

Jen has always been the child who has marched to a different drummer and managed to take different pathways through life right down to meeting her husband, Geoffrey, through the Internet. Thus, through the power of online chat, there has been a British-American merger. Both of them are fine young people. Neither of them is fully grounded in life in the way their siblings are. But, somehow the relationship works and that is all we can ask of our relationships one with the other. Often there is no way to explain how two people manage to dwell together through life in some sort of harmony. We may shake our heads at some of the couples we see around us not understanding the why or wherefore of the union. We need to learn that it is not for us to understand; whatever works for one relationship will not necessarily work for another. If we want to survive together we must find our balance through compromise and care, patience and love.

During this wedding sojourn I had the role of mother of the bride, or as some of you are fond of calling it, "the M.O.B." I happily turned the role of presiding pastor over to a friend of mine, I have done this with two of my children, the third eloped to me. I have been the presiding minister at many weddings, most which are still intact. I was surprised when two of my nieces reminded me they had been married 20 and 23 years as we caught up on family life.

As I reflected on these past ten days and on our scripture readings for this morning, I realized I was attended to by a number of shepherds intent on guiding me along through a stressful time. I also realized I did a little shepherding myself. Through this process, I came to see that most of us encounter shepherds of many different types in many different places in life.

For me there was the wonderful wedding consultant at my home church who simply took over the wedding process and guided us all through it. She organized the ushers, lined us all up and got us off on the right foot as we started down the aisle. This was no easy task, the flower girl was eighteen months old and, after a very good rehearsal, took two steps down the aisle on the day of the wedding and sat down with a loud complaint. Bea's mother and assistant encouraged her forward and she arose taking to the aisle like an actor to the red carpet. Her mother acted as a good shepherd in guiding her along her day's pathway. The matron of honor, Megan, needed no such prompting.

And then there was the bride, escorted by her mother. I had intended a rather stately walk down the aisle to Clarke's "Trumpet Voluntary" played by a cello, violin and, what else, a trumpet. I had not counted on a nervous bride who just wanted to get to her groom in the least number of steps necessary. As we took off down the aisle, I hoped that I would not walk out of, or be pulled out of, my shoes as I was led by a hasty shepherd to the front of the church. There I turned my child over into the hands of my good friend who beautifully and lovingly tied the knot between these two young folks. This was a literal tying of the knot, because Jen and Geoff had included, as part of the ceremony, a hand fasting rite using a cord the bride had created. At the end of the ceremony, I was shepherded safely back up the aisle by one of my sons-in-law. Shepherds abounded on that day.

Now, Jesus is known as the "good shepherd" for the ways in which he guided his followers and for the way in which his life and teachings continue to shepherd and guide us through life. His confidence in living life and in leading others to the fullness of life came from knowing that he and his Father were one. This is something that we tend to forget about our own make-up. As much as he was part of his God and God of him, we are involved in the same equation. And, as he had the

responsibility for guiding those around him, we do, too. If we all did this with the kindness and love Jesus showed to others, our world would be a much different place.

Each of us may say we are “no Jesus” but that is simply because we neglect the part of God that dwells within us, especially in our dealings with others. We are God’s children and, as such, we have the “God DNA”, if you will, that should encourage us onto the right pathways of life. We resist mightily in the way we lead our lives but if we truly want to be Christian in all we do, we discover at some point or other that “resistance is futile” and we give in to what it is God requires of us, “to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with our Creator.”

Dorcas must have learned her lessons well from Jesus. She must have treated those around her with the same love and care he did. When she died, she was mourned by many. They did not want to let her go. Peter came to the rescue by reviving and restoring her to them. He acted in Jesus’ stead as he had been told to do. He fed and nourished the sheep his Master had left behind along with many others. Did you notice that Dorcas, also known as Tabitha, is referred to as a “disciple” in this reading from Acts? There were many who acted as disciples those named and unnamed, those famous and not so famous, those who were male and those who were female. Jesus was pretty much an equal opportunity employer. Whomever it took to spread the “good news” and tend to the sheep that were to come were enlisted for the job.

Between the shepherd and the sheep there always needs to be a great level of trust. To allow anyone to lead us anywhere requires this whether we are being led into marriage or into a new city or into a new way of life. The trust factor is vital. Sometimes it takes a long time to establish trust in another person. At other times it is almost instant. But it must exist if there is to be any forward progress. Once someone betrays us and destroys the element of trust it is gone, perhaps, never to be reestablished. Jesus betrayed no one. That is why we still move forward trusting in the ways he taught us to live and move and have our being.

If we stop to think of those who have shepherded us the best in our lives, we will find that they have been the people who have never led us astray. They have never let us down as they have taken us beside still waters, and have restored souls that have sometimes run a bit dry. They have never betrayed us as they have led us in right paths and shown us the doors that needed to be opened. They have never abandoned us when we have walked through the valleys of despair, even the valleys bordering on death. They have helped us understand that surely goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our lives and that we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Our shepherds are in many places all reflecting, in many different ways, the faithful one meant to guide us all. ***Amen***