

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A SHEPHERD: 2ND QUARTER CHECK-UP

Pentecost 9-B

July 22, 2018

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

A common theme in today's readings is one of identity. The prophet Jeremiah, the psalmist, and Jesus himself speak of people as sheep; and in those varying references give us some sense of what "the flock" needs in terms of care and compassion, leadership and relationship. If this sounds like a familiar theme to some of you, you might recall that exactly three months ago, on April 22, the Fourth Sunday of Easter, we designate the day as "Good Shepherd" Sunday.

Is this a rerun? No, it's more of a reminder, and a look from a different angle. Today's readings speak of the sovereignty of The Good Shepherd, the responsibility of any shepherd (which, of course, is metaphoric for "leadership"), and the needs of "the sheep," those for whom our leaders, and we—as ordinary people, parents, politicians and others—find ourselves in the role of leading and caring for.

There's something to be said about our role to love one another and care for each other on any ordinary day—so talk of shepherding is always appropriate in the sense that those who are called to lead take on a great responsibility for others. Talk of leadership also seems timely in news cycles where our leaders are either praised or called out. But, with a baptism happening today, it seems like a good time to address our roles in guiding others, as parents, grandparents, friends, aunts and uncles, and fellow members of the body of Christ. Each one of us plays an important, even critical role, in the upbringing and the faith journey of those who have been placed in our midst.

Because we are called to care for one another, and because—in a few minutes—we will pledge our commitment to Allison as a part of this church and a part of our lives, it's important to be reminded that the things we say and the things we do matter. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, certainly sets before us the perfect example of what it means to guide with compassion and concern. While we might not believe we have "Son of God" power within us, don't underestimate your role for this child, and for every child of God who passes in our midst. Jesus promised that we will do "even greater things than these" in our daily life and work. The key is to keep in mind what is needed, what is most important, in the moments of grace—those times we share with those we love and those who look up to us.

When Jesus called his disciples to "come away to a deserted place" it wasn't simply an escape from their regular world, but rather an opportunity to pare things down to the basics. Three years ago, when we bought our little house up the road from here, we reveled in our basic furnishings and the uncluttered ambience of sunsets on the sound and the amazingly starlit night sky.

What a difference a few years can make. This week, making preparations for guests, I found myself decluttering, as more and more things have crept into the little house and the good life on our little deserted place.

That's a metaphor for life itself; and it speaks loudly to the things that we unwittingly allow to clutter up our relationships, friendships, child-rearing, care for our elders, and more. We owe it to Allison and to everyone who means something to us. Remembering *what we say and do matters*, we might realize that we have something to offer to the strangers in our midst, as well.

Each one is a child of God, and each one of us is a potential beacon of light to cut through the darkness that often clutters our world. Jealousy, selfishness, suspicion, and hatred have no place in that beacon of light.

As we stand up for one child this morning, remember that she is a precious child of God, and one of many God calls his own and places before us to care for, and to help grow in the knowledge and love of God and God's Son Jesus, whose light we are called and privileged to reflect. Amen.