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"Come away by yourselves to a quiet place and rest awhile!..." Mark 6:31
Are you ready to accept the invitation?

Fourth Sunday of Easter - Sheep?

7 May 2017

Yes, sheep. That's what Jesus called us. Now, a shepherd will tell you that sheep require more care and attention than any other kind of livestock. But anyone who has ever spent time around sheep knows that they are just about the dumbest creatures God ever created! Left to themselves, they will wander off and get lost. And it's not enough that one of them gets lost; others will fall in line and before you know it, all of them have gotten lost. Or they will wander into pastureland where the grass is too tall for them; and because of their strange center of gravity, they can easily trip and end upside down with all four legs in the air. They will die, if there is not a good shepherd close at hand to pick them up and put them back on their feet. They are really dumb!

Jesus, today again the Good Shepherd – and telling us that we are the sheep. There's no great compliment in that, folks! But there is a great truth. Do we not also require endless care and attention? Have you and I not also, at least occasionally, wandered off and gotten lost? How many times have I needed a good shepherd to pick me up, dust me off, and put me back on my feet again?

The Gospel is not primarily meant to make us feel good. First, it is meant to bring us to honest self-assessment. Being willing to recognize myself in these less-than-flattering qualities of sheep may be exactly what is required to see my lifelong need for ongoing conversion. Yes, conversion is the business of Lent, and we are now in the fourth week of Easter. But honesty demands admitting that I am not yet totally converted. Not 100%; not yet. Even now, there may be some small part of me – or, if I am willing to be radically honest, perhaps some not-so-small part of me – that does not yet reflect the image of God I am called to be. And so perhaps I need to hear again the very first words of scripture proclaimed way back on Ash Wednesday: "Even now, says the Lord, return to me with your whole heart..." (*Joel 2:12*).

Perhaps I need to hear again the words of the Good Shepherd:

"My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.

I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish" (Jn. 10:30).

Perhaps being a sheep isn't so bad, after all.

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