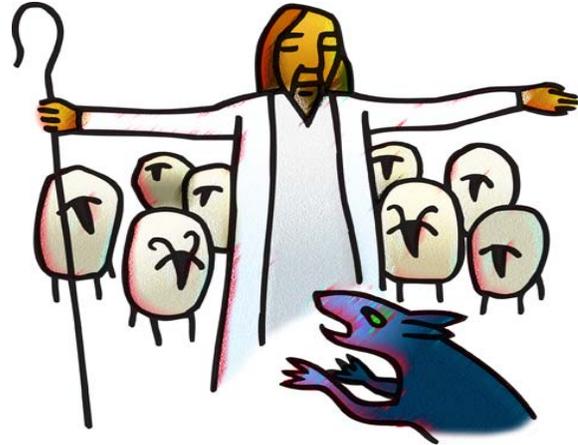


The first verse of our final hymn today is:

**Savior, like a shepherd lead us;
much we need thy tender care;
in thy pleasant pastures feed us;
for our use thy folds prepare.
Blessèd Jesus! Blessèd Jesus!
Thou hast bought us, thine we are.¹**



Today is generally called “Good Shepherd” Sunday if you hadn’t already figured that out when reading the lessons and praying the collect. Images abound of Jesus as the good shepherd who calls to us and who knows each of us by name. We, who follow Jesus, respond to that voice and are thus enabled to live into the grace of God, freely and abundantly given.

Shepherds are prevalent in the Bible- from the prophet Jeremiah: “Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding” (3:15) to Isaiah: “He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young” (40:11) to the familiar shepherds in the Christmas story and to Jesus’ description of himself: “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11).

A shepherd as you can tell from these verses is charged with caring for the sheep and protecting them from harm. The shepherd is also charged with leading the sheep to food and drink, the green pastures and still waters of Psalm 23.

Does this imagery work for us in middle-America in the 21st century or is it a “that’s nice but it doesn’t mean anything in my life”? If the idea of a shepherd doesn’t make much sense to you, what image might? Perhaps a school counselor that helped you decide whether to go to college or vocational training, leading and guiding once that counselor knew your strengths and challenges as well as your dreams. Perhaps it was the first boss who helped you move into adulthood through helping you understand the importance of showing up on time, staying till quitting time and why what you wore to work mattered. Perhaps it was a parent, a sibling or a friend who listened to your dreams and your frustrations and helped you find your own true voice in the world. We have lots of shepherds around us if we are willing to open our eyes and our ears and our hearts to those who truly have our best interests at heart- even if we sometimes don’t want to acknowledge the truths they tell us.

In the Episcopal Church, a bishop carries a crosier as an outward and visible sign of his authority and of her responsibility to be the shepherd of the flock, the Diocese, over which the bishop presides. According to Wikipedia, “the traditional explanation for the form of Western crosiers, beyond the obvious reference to the bishop as a shepherd to his flock, is this: the pointed [ferrule](#) at

¹ [Hymnal 1982](#), no. 708: “Savior like a shepherd lead us.”

the base symbolizes the obligation of the prelate to goad the spiritually lazy; the crook at the top, his obligation to draw back those who stray from the faith; and the staff itself his obligation to stand as a firm support for the faithful. It is considered to be both a rod and a staff (Psalm 23:4): a rod for punishing the recalcitrant, and a staff for leading the faithful.” And, if you’ve ever watched old black-and-white vaudeville acts, you may have seen the shepherd’s hook used in old time movies to pull a bad actor off the stage!

Cate Waynick has called for the election of the Eleventh Bishop of the Diocese of Indianapolis. While the election will not be held until October 2016, with consecration in April 2017, there is much to be done between now and then.

On the credenza in the hallway, I have placed some information on the qualifications for those that might wish to serve on the Search or the Transition Committees. I have also placed a timeline so you can better understand what will be occurring between now and April 2017. Please do ask me if you have questions about the process or if you would like to be nominated to serve on either the Search or the Transition Committee.

The imagery of shepherd, then, is relevant both to our readings today and the role of a bishop in The Episcopal Church. In the Gospel reading, Jesus tells us that he will lay down his life for us, and indeed he did so on the cross. Jesus also acknowledges that there are other sheep that do not currently belong to the flock and that they, too, are to be brought into the flock so that there is one flock and one shepherd. Despite his death and his resurrection, the work of Jesus is not done. We have been given the Holy Spirit as an advocate and a comforter to help us until our time comes to be reunited with God.

Until that time, our Diocesan Bishop serves as someone charged with caring for the people of God, lay and clergy, and in fact with all persons whatever their faith and even those who characterize themselves as “no affiliation.” We are called to widen our embrace and deepen our faith and to be a beacon of the light of Christ to all the nations.

When explaining the role of a bishop in our church, the Book of Common Prayer says: “The ministry of a bishop is to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as apostle, chief priest and pastor of the diocese; to guard the faith, unity and discipline of the whole church; to proclaim the Word of God; to act in Christ’s name for the reconciliation of the world and the building up of the Church; and to ordain others to continue Christ’s ministry” (BCP 855). In other words, a bishop is to be a current day shepherd.

Ministry is not, though, just the responsibility and obligation- and the joy- of a bishop or a priest or deacon. Ministry is for all persons, lay and ordained. Ministry is bigger than any of us individually. Collectively, we are formed in the image and likeness of God and thus collectively we have the joy of spreading the good news. Each of us is, then, in this sense, called to be a shepherd who guards and guides those with whom we live, work and interact. We, as shepherds, are to watch out for each other and to promote the well-being of each other.

But, a bishop in our Episcopal tradition is specifically charged to carry on the apostolic work of leading, supervising and uniting the Church (BCP 510). The position of chief shepherd in our time-

that is, bishop- is reflected in a prayer during the Consecration when the hands of the Presiding Bishops and other Bishops present are placed upon the head of the Bishop-elect:

To you, O Father, all hearts are open; fill, we pray, the heart of this your servant whom you have chosen to be a bishop in your Church, with such love of you and of all the people, that he may feed and tend the flock of Christ, and exercise without reproach the high priesthood to which you have called him, serving before you night and day in the ministry of reconciliation, declaring pardon in your Name, offering the holy gifts, and wisely overseeing the life and work of the Church. In all things may he present before you the acceptable offering of a pure and gentle and holy life; through Jesus Christ your Son, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and power and glory in the Church, now and forever. Amen (BCP 521).

God's love abides in the best of our shepherds – lay and clergy. It is through God's love that a shepherd can help us find our true calling and our best response to God's love, mercy and grace.

As we begin this period of transition from one bishop to another- from one earthly shepherd to another, let us remember this verse from Ephesians (3: 20-21) which concludes the service of Evening Prayer: "Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine: Glory to him from generation to generation in the Church, and in Christ Jesus, for ever and ever." **Amen** (BCP 126)