



The Fourth Sunday of Easter (A)
May 3, 2020
Christ, The Shepherd of the Sheep
The Rev. Dr. Christian Brocato, Rector

+May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our Strength and Redeemer. Amen.

I was recently was given what appeared to be a child's book with colorful illustrations. At first, I was quizzical about having been given a book which my years on this earth seemed too advanced to find relevant.

The book is *Crow and Weasel*. It is a fascinating book, one which is engaging, provocative and deeply curious. The main characters are a crow and a weasel. No surprise there. Dressed in human vesture, American Indian clothing with hunting gear apparent, the crow and the weasel set out for an adventure.

Crow and Weasel set out to go further afoot than anyone had every traveled. "On their bold and wonderful journey.... Crow and Weasel meet with terrifying danger and spectacular beauty... Theirs is a story of great adventure, but is also a story of the way humans imagine their courage, responsibilities and dreams." (Inside cover text: *Crow and Weasel*. Lopez and Pohert. North Point Press. ISBN 0-86547-439-7)

A character in the book is a Badger who says, "Remember only this one thing, the stories people tell have a way of taking care of them. If stories come to you, care for them, and learn to give them away where they are needed. Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive..." (*Crow and Weasel*)

Indeed, the stories of our lives inform us and give life meaning. Over time, stories implanted in our memories can give us courage and can enable us to see how to live responsible lives while also dreaming beyond the routine of daily life.

Today's Gospel story, a provocative analogy developed around the characters of a shepherd and sheep, is one such story in our lives of faith. It is a story which far too easily can be cast in an agrarian framework which most of us have never experienced.

In the Gospel, the shepherd's voice is known by the tended sheep. It is a voice of comfort, care and stability. The story includes the image of a gate which enables the shepherd to protect the flock from predators of one kind or another. On one level, the story enables Jesus to teach his disciples, and on another level, the story is about us.

We are disciples of Jesus whose spiritual lives need tending. During these days of the reality of the pandemic, do we not need "comfort, care and stability"? Our lives have been disrupted, and the journey of life is a new reality to be sure.

Crow and Weasel heard a voice deep within them and set out on a journey, united as one, different as individuals, yet similar in goal and dream. The disciples of Jesus heard his voice, a voice which called them from the routines of their lives to follow him. He called them beyond their wildest dreams into a new reality of giving of themselves for the sake of others.

We are called to hear the voice of God in Jesus deep within us. It is a call to relationship and a call into a deeper reality of what it might mean for us to be shepherds of the sheep entrusted to our care in life. We need only think about all those on the 'front lines' of life, first responders, medical professionals, grocery store workers and others who are caring for others.

Sealed as Christ's own at Baptism, we are called to put into action those things to which we are called as Christians and be a life-giving force for others. As disciples of Jesus, how do our lives mirror the life of the good shepherd? How can we live as he lived and people of truth, justice, care and stability?

During these days of statistics day after day, the Corona Virus is real. It is debilitating. It has been and will be life-changing for people all around the world. It has ensnared the world in a kind of darkened unity which the world has never known.

Every time I offer Morning or Evening Prayer via live-stream videos, a specific prayer to combat the pandemic is included. We need God's intervention, God's grace, God's ability to give strength, stability and comfort. We need God's grace for solutions and quickly, so that life can resume in ways that will enable healing and wholeness in our midst.

The current journey in which we find ourselves is challenging in the extreme. To think otherwise would be to live within the pages of a book of myths without depth or meaning.

The world in which we find ourselves is not a myth; it is a reality of realities! Only God can give us what we need to be strong and stable and bearers of hope and love for others. That hope and love were exemplified in the life of Jesus. His was a love that he bore to the Cross and on to Resurrection that we might have life.

The love of Jesus calls us to act to help make the world a better place in which to live. Our amazing stories in response to the food pantry drive, today's Walk for Good Food and the May Diaper Drive are a few examples of the love St. Mark's has for others. Staying safe and following virus prevention protocols are also examples of how we care for ourselves and for others. These things actions craft the stories of our lives.

What will our stories look and feel like post pandemic? Will our memories house lives within a relationship to God and one another outside the walls of beautiful St. Mark's? Can we see our lives in relationship to God in Jesus as being built on a new foundation, not of brick and mortar, but of a heightened spiritual connectivity through the grace of the Holy Spirit?

We can choose life in the Spirit. We can craft stories which engage the love of God in Jesus, a love which unites us through the Spirit and through space. We can walk in love as we are loved, a love which knits us together in ways like never before. Amen.