

## The Flock.

Here we are today in very different circumstances than two months ago. Many of us, are listening for the hourly news hoping to hear any good news on the horizon. We are listening to all the experts as to what will become of us all in this temporary isolation we have been living in these past almost two months. And yet here we are listening to the good news that sustains and nourishes us each day. There is the news cycle that feeds on disaster and suffering, and the good news we seek because we belong to a flock and we have been told that our shepherd will guide us, protect us, lead us. In the words of the psalmist, still water, green pasture and a banquet.

When Jesus spoke to his disciples, he used the visual images at hand. His explanations or parables are often agricultural in part, because this was the every day world he lived in. Christ used things that could be readily grasped, and understood by every day people. And sheep, would have been at the centre of the society in which he moved. And of course shepherds. And we all know what shepherds do, and why they they do it. They have been entrusted to protect and guard the flocks that has been entrusted to them.

Shepherds know more than most of us do. Their livelihood depends on it. In the dynamics of the natural world, there are only predator or prey. There are predators out there, waiting for their next meal, there is rocky ground where sheep may become isolated and stumble or become wounded. There are thieves also who might appropriate the flocks of other shepherds and steal them. More importantly there are unseen circumstances which separate the sheep from one another. Leaving them vulnerable and without their flock to shelter them. Isolation is the strategy of a predator.

A pandemic might be a good analogy. We are told to shelter in place, but who are we sheltering with, under whose wing do we seek refuge and consolation. The voice of the shepherd in our case, is the voice of Christ. It is his voice I hear, in all the cacaphony. The only voice I need.

Even in the midst of this topsy turvy world, today we are listening for his voice to strengthen us through the word. How often I have heard that Shepherds voice in the places where I feel part of a flock. The prison for example, where the words of the shepherd sustain many a soul in the hardest of situations. Especially today, we are straining to hear the voice of our Shepherd over the noise and din of completing narratives. We must lean in, and find that voice.

How does one lean in and listen for the good news? By gathering together as we have been doing under the most amazing circumstances. There are images I am sure we can all recall having seen in the papers over the years. The photos of military Chaplains cradling the wounded members of their flock while administering the last rights. The famous story of 9/11, when a Catholic preist Father Mychal Judge, Chaplain for the New York Fire Department was the first recorded victim of 9/11. Shepherds are ready to rumble, to go in the dark and dangerous places and pull others to safety. Our own shepherd calls us back to him in the midst of our distress and uncertainty. Shepherds don't quit on the flock. They commit, and follow through. Jesus is the shepherd in John. Jesus means what he says. Few here today would argue his saving grace, his words of comfort, his intentions for us. We belong to him, we are his flock, if only we will listen. Keeping the flock together amidst circumstances that would

scatter them is crucial. Many people in our christian community are looking out for other members of the flock who are living alone, are in difficult circumstances, who may be sick or greiving at this time. Father Tim, Father Tyson, and Father Nick are all manifesting the qualities of shepherds, reaching out to us to ensure our safety, and security. Keeping us connected. The great shepherd is consoling his flock in Nova Scotia, and using the chaplains of the police forces, and the local leadership in the church, to listen, to reach out in love and to re-assure the greiving. No doubt at some time today we will listen to the voices of news broadcasters with either good or bad news. Today in our gospel we have heard the voice of Jesus. May it sustain, and feed us, and help us to feel part of his flock, and may it foster our affection for those we meet who do not feel they belong to any flock, and have no shepherd.

I been asked over the years why I bother with my christian faith. John's passage has always been my answer. My sheep hear my voice. I hear Christs voice, and I am listening. We sheep hear his voice, because we are listening for the good news, every day and in every situation. Each and every one of us on this zoom platform today is listening for his words, his voice. Imagine that. In the midst of a pandemic we gather to listen to the words of love and encouragement from the great shepherd. How lucky we are to to follow Christ, to be his flock, to have him as our great shepherd, to turn to him and live.