

Sounds of the Shepherd – based on Psalm 23 and John 10:1-10
Aspen Community UMC
April 13, 2008

Page 1 of 5

Our image of God in the reading is a shepherd
who keeps the sheep safe from predators.
And our image of God in the reading is a gate –
the gate which the shepherd actually becomes when he or she lays down
in the opening of the sheepfold –
the place where the sheep stay overnight.

Tending sheep was a very commonplace activity in many places and still is.
Sheep used to run through the streets of Aspen, not that long ago.

I do not like to think of myself as a sheep, but
I do want that shepherd, the shepherd's care, love, and commitment to my wellbeing.

There are few writings as comforting as the 23rd Psalm.
Its images transcend time so very well.
We do long for the shepherd who will protect us.

This passage in the New Testament is also one of several of the "I am" statements

Attributed to Jesus in the Gospel of John:

I am the gate for the sheep. I am the good shepherd.

I am the bread of life (John 6:35)

I am the light of the world. I am the door.

I am the resurrection and the life. (John 11:25)

I am the way, the truth and the life (John 14)

I am the true vine. (John 15)

Let's think about the "I AM" statements today as we consider the sheepfold.

Let's consider this enclosure. It was often a stone fence.

In your mind consider and picture this sheepfold, this sturdy, stone fence.

And while some had hinged gates - this one has an opening,

That opening is where the shepherd lies down to sleep.

The shepherd thereby protects the sheep because anyone or anything
that wants to enter the sheepfold, must go over the shepherd.

So, the shepherd guards the sheep all night.

The sheep are safe. The sheep are able to trust the shepherd.

Sounds of the Shepherd – based on Psalm 23 and John 10:1-10
Aspen Community UMC
April 13, 2008

Page 2 of 5

As I contemplated this enclosure this week, it took on the image of
a space where I could be with Christ, to be enclosed by his love,
where I could let everything go that cluttered my mind
and be with the "I AM."

Just repeat to myself "I AM."

And, take in breath to support my being open to his mysterious presence.

"I AM." Some practitioners of yoga will repeat the word "aum."

Ernest Holmes said that God is a presence personified in us -
that spirituality is not a thing; it is an atmosphere of God's presence,
goodness, truth and beauty.¹

And being aware of that presence is to savor that atmosphere.

Dennis Merritt Jones writes:

As a mother views her child through the eyes of love...

As a scientist views the stars in the heavens above...

But, most of us are so deeply rooted in the world of work, people,
so deeply rooted in the happenings and conditions of our life.
We are so tied to places and things. We are tied to the content of our lives.

And, we don't think of taking time to step back
and see our lives through the eyes of God.

But here is an opportunity to do that.

And there are opportunities all the time to do that,
but we often do not think of them or remain aware of them.

When we do, it is not hard to consider that God is all there is.
And if God is all there is, we are the living embodiment of God.

We are to God as our hand is to our body.

So, I invite you to see this space our reading gives us this morning
and let it be an enclosure – let it be the sheepfold -
in which you and I can be with the mystery of God.
As if Christ is that door into the mystery of God

Sounds of the Shepherd – based on Psalm 23 and John 10:1-10
Aspen Community UMC
April 13, 2008

Page 3 of 5

and Christ holds that door open into which we can go
and keeps us safe even in the darkness of our imaginations.

We all search for the spirit.
We sometimes think conditions have to be just right -
just the right liturgy, or just the right kind of music -
or just the right sermon – or just the right something.

Or that to lead a spiritual life
is to change what we normally do in our daily life.
Really, it seems to me to be more about a vitality
we bring to our work and our activities that recognizes a spiritual life –
Or life itself on a background of the sacred.

The sheepfold represents to me an inner space
and so I think about the background of my daily life.

It reminds me of something Eckhart Tolle wrote
in *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose*.
He writes about recognizing inner space.
And I want to think of this safe place Jesus describes
where the shepherd keeps the sheep
to be something like the inner space
that we feel when we separate out all the thought forms
and ideas, and worries, and plans, and content of our minds.
Some of the ancient teachers called it ananda -or the bliss of Being.²
Some forms of prayer can get us to that space.

So, I am inviting you to join me in this space that Jesus
opens for us in this brief parable.
And while the short parable is about a place for sheep,
and, of course, Jesus' listeners were the sheep – and so are we.
Today, let's let it be a place for us to be
more highly aware, more conscious, of simply being.
And let it be a place where all the content of our lives is left outside
so you can enjoy the simple beauty of being alive.

Sounds of the Shepherd – based on Psalm 23 and John 10: 1-10
Aspen Community UMC
April 13, 2008

Page 4 of 5

Why? You might ask. Because, this is the place - from which we are able to see beauty.

And it is out of this place - that we appreciate simple things.

It is out of this place – that one learns to enjoy their own company.

And it is from this place - that we naturally relate to others with loving kindness.

And, part of that is because it is a space of being grounded.

We might think of it as a kind of background in us that makes these things possible.

It is really like the cloudless sky.

Perhaps Jesus is calling us to this place.

It is not something we look for - it is there behind things.

Perhaps it looks for us as the shepherd does for the sheep.

The poets and the sages have called it
the joy of being - found in the simple, unremarkable things.

Like simply saying "I am."

I am the gate. I am the shepherd.

This is the "to be" word. It means being conscious.

And he invites us to be still and simply be.

Why? Because it is the way we can almost hear the essence of God.

For it is in the spaces – between all the content and action of our lives.

I went to find this space yesterday
after learning we had been burglarized - our space invaded.

What hurt was the history, the documents and pictures.

These items were in a small safe – perhaps a fireproof safe.

They carried some of the history of our church.

But the safety of those things

is not the safety and protection that the scripture is telling us about.

What the scripture is telling us is that the presence and spirit of God
is always there putting it all back together in a space of creativity.

And if that were not there, all would be lost.

Sounds of the Shepherd – based on Psalm 23 and John 10: 1-10
Aspen Community UMC
April 13, 2008

Page 5 of 5

So, here have been my thoughts and my reflections on the shepherd,
the sheepfold, and the gate.

Perhaps my thoughts on these things can open this space for you
and encourage you to view the background -
what is behind
the stuff, the activities, and endeavors of your life.

Because when we become more aware,
we are usually more content,
more apt to see beauty, and enjoy the simplicity of life.

We are more likely to notice the blue sky behind white clouds
or hear the song of a bird in the early morning -
more than stopping to smell the roses.

It might even help us walk, talk, and act with a greater sense of reverence.

Jesus' stories and images always give us room to explore.

Creativity begins there, where the spirit seems to reside.

I hope my explorations help you see our reading in some new ways
so you can see the shepherd and the gate
in a way you have not done before.

¹ Dennis Merritt Jones. *The Art of Being: 101 Ways to Practice Purpose in Your Life*. p. 187.

² Eckhart Tolle. *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose*. p. 234.