

Easter 4C - 2022

Called by Many Voices

Now if I had to nominate one animal to represent the word mediocre, a sheep would easily be in the top five. Sheep are **not independent**. They cannot defend themselves like cattle. They are **not strong, creative, brave** nor will they initiate. They cannot even work up a good stampede. Normally, they just sort of meander. Also, sheep will not be driven, like cattle. They will scatter in a thousand different directions. This type of behavior did not earn the animal any respect on the open range so the ranchers assumed that the animal was dumb.

However, a sheep is actually smarter than a cow. So why does Jesus choose to use a sheep to represent his disciples? Even in ancient society, sheep and shepherds did not garner the respect and admiration of the rich and famous. They did not have a contest to see which shepherd would be the next "Israeli Idol." For us who do not live in an agrarian society, it is even harder to understand. I have never identified myself with a sheep. Popular artists write songs about soaring on the wings of eagles, not grazing with the lambs.

Sheep have one particularly admirable quality. They will follow their shepherd wherever he leads them. They have learned to know him and trust him. They are not easily distracted by another shepherd. Move three flocks into a field, place three shepherds at three strategic points and have each of them issue a call. The sheep will sort themselves. You will not need brands to recognize which sheep belongs to which shepherd. Every animal will only follow his/her shepherd.

The people of God have been placed in a very large field that is often called the world. Many voices are calling us to come and join them. The voice of **materialism** wants us to deny our faith in the supernatural and believe only in the physical world. The voice of **consumerism** calls us to fulfill our envy by overspending on vacations, cars, clothing and a home. The voice of **entertainment** wants to fill our lives with media driven flashes that grab our attention, isolate us from our family and friends and then leave us with nothing but an oversized bill. (by John H. Pavelko from *The Voice That Calls Us to Follow*)

I saw a clip of a TV news show the other day in which they tested fire detectors in 2 firemen's home. The loud warning signal did not waken the children -- even after a few minutes. Then they tested a new detector, which plays a recording of the parents' voices calling the children by name and telling them to wake up and get out of the house. Within seconds, not minutes, all the children woke up, even out of the deadest sleep.

The Rewards of Loving

There once was a young woman who had a baby boy. Just after her son's baptism, a ragged old man came to her, and offered to grant her one wish on behalf of her son. Thinking only the best for her baby, the woman wished that her son would always be loved by everyone he met. The old man said, "so be it," and vanished.

It turned out just as he said. As the boy grew, everyone loved him so much that he never lacked for anything. Yet, things did not turn out as expected. As adored and admired as the young man was, he experienced a terrible emptiness within him. He could have anything he wanted, just by asking, but he had no real friends.

He never knew the joy of a day's work or an achievement, richly rewarded. His neighbors took care of all his needs. The young man became cynical, jaded and selfish as none of his actions ever brought him any negative consequences.

Finally, the day came when his aged mother died. At the funeral, the same mysterious old man appeared and offered the young man one wish. The young man took him up on his offer and asked that his mother's original wish for him be changed.

Rather than being loved by everyone he met, the young man asked the old wizard to give him the power to love everyone he met.

And, the story goes, from that day forward he knew happiness such as no one on this earth has ever known. (by Keith Wagner from *The Promise of Listening*)