

The Sunday Missive -- May 8, 2022

The Fourth Sunday in Eastertide

LEVAS Hymn 194 Lead me, guide me along the way

I am weak, and I need Thy strength and power
To help me over my weakest hour;
Let me through the darkness Thy face to see,
Lead me, O Lord, lead me.

Refrain:

Lead me, guide me along the way; for if You lead me, I cannot stray;
Lord, let me walk each day with Thee. Lead me, O Lord, lead me.

Help me tread in the paths of righteousness;
Be my aid when Satan and sin oppress.
I am putting all my trust in Thee,
Lead me, O Lord, lead me. [Refrain]

I am lost, if you take your hand from me;
I am blind, without Thy Light to see;
Lord, just always let me Thy servant be,
Lead me, O Lord, lead me. [Refrain]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PLpB-dE2DHM>

The Collect of the Day

O God, whose Son Jesus is the good shepherd of your people; grant that when we hear his voice we may know him who calls us each by name, and follow where he leads; who, with you and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, forever and ever. *Amen.*

Acts 9:36-43

In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor. About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples

heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!"

Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.

Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive. This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.

He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yLxdb3ov-zE>

Revelation 7:9-17

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!" And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, singing, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?" I said to him, "Sir, you are the one that knows." Then he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Hymn 306 Come, risen Lord, and be our guest

Come, risen Lord, and deign to be our guest;
No, let us be your guests and with you dine;
At your own table now be manifest
In your own sacrament of bread and wine.

We meet as in the upper room they met;
Now at the table, blessing, yet you stand:
'This is my body': this you give us yet;
Faith still receives the cup as from your hand.

One body we, one body who partake,
One church united in communion blessed;

One name we bear, one bread of life we break,
With all your saints on earth and saints at rest.

One with each other, Lord, and one in you,
Who are one Saviour and one living head;
Open our eyes to see with vision true;
Be known to us in breaking of the bread.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yQV0EKgvJeA&t=32s>

John 10:22-30

Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon's Colonnade. The people who were there gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly."

Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one."

All We Like Sheep -- Easter 4C

Here we go again with the lambs and the sheep. This is week three of passages having something to do with lambs and sheep. Why do these insistent metaphors pervade holy scripture? What is it with God and sheep?

John's gospel gets off to a pretty good start: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Now that I can accept! I love words, and if you tell me that the perfect words will gain me access to godliness, then Right On! Word! All we have to do is express ourselves properly enough, explicate our ideas articulately enough and we'll be on our way. It doesn't hurt to note that this idea is a very old one indeed. We visited a maritime museum in Gdańsk last week, where we learned that the ancient Norse people also talked about the origins of life in the spoken words of the god Odin.

Over the course of our story, those words, that Word goes from being language to being a human being. And soon enough, the Christ isn't

recommending mere words anymore; action is what is called for. Jesus is saying “Feed my Sheep; tend my lambs.” Today, we said together the most familiar verses in all scripture, known to Jews and Christians alike, “The Lord is my shepherd...” and we are the sheep. The visions of John of Patmos, so wondrously presented in Revelation, just full of sheep! In fact the world is saved and led...by a lamb. What is it with these sheep?

One thing we have to do is to put the writings and ourselves in context. When and where these stories came to be told and recorded, most everyone had daily contact with the sheep and goats that sustained them. As is still the case in many cultures, especially in Africa, the animals were both holy and precious, even as they were consumed and employed. Dowries were given, and still are, in sheep, goats, buffalo or cattle. They provided wool and skins for clothing, milk and cheese for sustenance, and on very special occasions, meat for celebratory sacrifice and eating. Everyone had a direct, vital and spiritual connection with them.

How hard is it for us modern people to relate to this sense of interdependence! Without a good shepherd, these animals would be mere lion- or wolf-bait. Without the sheep, even the shepherd would be naked, hungry and ungodly. Perhaps especially in our country, where pride in ourselves is a central cultural theme – however dubious -- it is difficult to think about, let alone embrace, interdependence between ourselves and anything or anybody, certainly not sheep. Except perhaps the scapegoat, and petroleum.

So it takes some hard work to find our lives in this imagery, to identify ourselves as one of these creatures God so relentlessly insists we have to be. We have to do some counterintuitive work and get out from under the burden of our pride if we want to breathe the clean fresh air of grace. That’s why the teachings of Jesus are so full of paradox: “The last shall be first,” the foolish wisdom and power in submission, the dying to live that is so central to our religious identity. “Become as a child in order to be wise.” All comes from God, yet we each of us make our choices. “Surrender to win.” God knows we have to get used to this inside-out kind of thinking if we want to be transformed

But even if we desire to do this, what actions can we take to become sheeply? And why would we, with all the lions and wolves – and bears -- around these days and few shepherds in sight? Jesus’ two-part answer is just this: Believe and feed. A grain of belief, like the famous mustard seed, can grow and blossom in the human heart into a life of feeding with untold

and far-reaching consequences. This month, our community has performed a magnificent act of belief-based feeding by contributing much-needed support to *Polska Czerwony Krzyż*, the Polish Red Cross, who are helping to care for the 3.2 million Ukrainian war refugees who have entered Poland in the past eleven weeks. This is the healing power of belief.

The power of the risen Christ is not just an isolated historical incident, but an ongoing source of healing and nurture. The disciples are also possessed of the power to heal, so Tabitha wakes up for Peter. Tabitha's name in Greek is Dorcas, which is a common kind of gazelle across the north of Africa and in those days up into Mesopotamia. A beautiful creature; there's a picture of one in our library. It is a cousin of the sheep. So our story from Acts also beckons us up onto the bovid bandwagon.

We are each other's healers, each other's shepherds, each other's sheep, as long as we shall live. Every community has the opportunity, by caring for one another, to live out this belief. Our mutual healing may not take the dramatic form of bringing people literally back from the grave – at least not very often. But preserving their lives from murderous tyranny comes pretty close. And what about the many kinds of spiritual, emotional, and vocational graves we can wallow in, that only the comfort, understanding, and supportive companionship of our fellow shepherds can help us escape? Jesus came not to abolish the human condition, but to transform it.

When Jesus tells the temple leaders, 'You all just don't get it, you're not my sheep.' He's not excluding them, he's merely identifying them. 'Of course you don't get it, because you don't want it. I'm not going to make you,' said, perhaps, with a shrug, like you might to a recalcitrant and angry teenager: 'I'm here when you want to talk.' No one is to be excluded, ever! All are called, but few are chosen; and they are self-selected. Belief is an inside job. Shepherds don't make sheep. Sheep make sheep.

The great Mahatma Gandhi once said he had three enemies: The first, and by far the most easily changed for the better, was the British Empire. The second, which was far more difficult, was the Indian populace he hoped to help. And the third was Mohandas K. Gandhi, that is, himself; with him he had very little influence at all.

How do we make ourselves sheep? By being honest: "Lord I believe, help my unbelief." Instead of, "Well I would like to have stronger faith, but under the circumstances, I guess I'm doing ok." It's pray to want to pray to want to pray. Sooner or later, my unbelief will get exhausted, and the clean

robe will fall on my shoulders like a cloud. The yoke is easy; the burden is light.

Because we are Christ's hands and feet and voices in the world, the meaning of Jesus' dwelling among us as our shepherd is contained in the lives and relationships of each of us. What Christ means is as wonderfully various as the great congregation from every nation: all tribes and peoples and languages that gathers before the throne. Sheep and shepherds all. And you will know us by our love.

A Prayer for Mother's Day

On this Mothers' Day, we give thanks to God for the divine gift of motherhood in all its diverse forms.

Let us pray for all the mothers among us today;

- for our own mothers, those living and those who have died;
- for the mothers who loved us and for those who fell short of loving us fully;
- for all who hope to be mothers someday and for those whose hopes to have children have been frustrated
- for all mothers who have lost children;
- for all women and men who have mothered others in any way – those who have been substitute mothers, and we who have done so for those in need;
- and for the great mother earth that bore us and provides us with sustenance.

Hymn 460 Alleluia! Sing to Jesus!

Alleluia! sing to Jesus! his the scepter, his the throne;
Alleluia! his the triumph, his the victory alone;
Hark! the songs of peaceful Zion thunder like a mighty flood;
Jesus out of every nation hath redeemed us by his blood.

Alleluia! not as orphans are we left in sorrow now;
Alleluia! he is near us, faith believes, nor questions how:

Though the cloud from sight received him, when the forty days were o'er,
Shall our hearts forget his promise, "I am with you evermore"?

Alleluia! Bread of Heaven, thou on earth our food, our stay!
Alleluia! here the sinful flee to thee from day to day:
Intercessor, friend of sinners, earth's Redeemer, plead for me,
Where the songs of all the sinless sweep across the crystal sea.

Alleluia! King eternal, thee the Lord of lords we own:
Alleluia! born of Mary, earth thy footstool, heaven thy throne:
Thou within the veil hast entered, robed in flesh, our great High Priest:
Thou on earth both Priest and Victim in the eucharistic feast.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9wxyYMAZnoc>

Now may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, through the power of the eternal covenant, make you eager in every good work to live in lovingkindness, ever working in you all that is well-pleasing in God's sight; and thus the blessing of God Almighty, Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer be with you and those whom you love this day and remain with you forever. Amen.

From Tanka Diary

The botanical garden is just as I remember,
although it is certain that everything
has changed since my last visit.

How many hilarious questions these fuzzy
fiddleheads are inquiring of spring
will be answered as green ferns unfurl?

Walking the path, I stop to pick up
bleached bark from a tree, curled into
a scroll of ancient wisdom I am unable to read.

Even in my dreams I'm hiking
these mountain trails expecting to find a rock
that nature has shaped to remind me of a heart.

Harryette Mullen