

Fourth Sunday of Easter
Revelation 7:9-17, John 10:22-30, Psalm 23
Amanda Scott, Missionary
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Being God's lamb

"The Lord is my shepherd." David wrote it, Jesus lived it. The Lord is our shepherd too. That makes us sheep, which are really dumb animals! They blindly obey and follow the shepherd. But what if, instead of dumb, we say sheep are faithful. They do exactly what the shepherd says and go exactly where he leads. They trust him to keep them safe. They worry about nothing. The shepherd, in turn, is also faithful. He is with them always, goes after the lost lamb, protects them from danger, no one will snatch them out of his hand. Being a sheep sounds better and better if you follow the right shepherd.

Jesus, the Lamb of God, showed us how to follow the Shepherd. In the Garden of Gethsemane, He prayed, "yet not my will, but yours be done." The Lamb of God is also our shepherd. "My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me."

What is it like to be one of God's lambs? I never gave it much thought until I moved to Honduras to work for the LAMB Institute. We are all about the Lamb of God, our shepherd. Our day school and children's home are called Los Corderitos de Dios - "God's littlest lambs." Our church is El Buen Pastor, Church of the Good Shepherd. Our motto is based on Revelation 14:4, "following the Lamb wherever He goes."

"We walk through the valley of the shadow of death," says the psalmist. Sometimes we stumble there, through our own choices and sometimes He leads us there for His own purposes. However, sometimes we are dragged there by someone else. About a year ago, a mother sent her 6 year old son, whom I will call Juancito, out with his 18 month old sister...to sell her for \$20. She told, "If you come back with her, this time I will break both of your arms. But, our shepherd would not let evil snatch the children out of His hand. Instead, He sent Social Services to intercept His precious lambs and deliver them to us. They are safe, loved, and happy at our Children's Home! If you come visit us in Honduras, brace yourself because Juancito will leap into your arms from a running start!

Other people live in the valley of the shadow of death. In Flor del Campo, a gang-ridden barrio on the outskirts of Tegucigalpa, 200 young men choose Jesus instead of gangs and drugs. They join our Alonzo Movement, led by volunteers from Flor, many of whom were the first young members of the program. Jesus' message of love is so compelling, leading them beside the still waters of peace and hope, they invite their friends to join them. Every new Alonzo member is one lamb snatched from the hands of Satan and his gangs.

A little girl, whom I will call Maria, was 3 when her father was killed. A short time later, she was kidnapped. She saw a young man be killed and figured she was next. Thanks be to God, she was rescued three days later. Then, she witnessed her mother's murder. She went to live with her grandmother who got cancer and died. Maria was living in the valley of death. Then Maria entered kindergarten ... at our school on a full scholarship. Today, she is a bright 7th grader with good grades who sings, "I believe in you, Jesus, and what you will do in me." She believes that surely God's goodness and mercy shall follow her all the days of her life. She has a dream and hope for a future.

This does not happen accidentally. Pentecost is coming, when Jesus sent the disciples, and all of us, out into the world to make disciples of all nations. He sends us out and uses us as His instruments to bring salvation to the world. Juancito, his sister, the members of the Alonzo Movement, Maria and so many more are following the Lamb because many people before them chose to follow the Lamb. They are the works that Jesus does, in his Father's name. Our stories about children saved, trafficking victims rescued and restored, medical miracles, protection from real and present dangers, youth choosing life over death and so many more are examples of God's love and presence in this world. These are big, wonderful acts. Just like John said, these are just a few. I could fill hours, days and years with more. But God doesn't just do the big, sweeping acts. He is in the moments of our lives too, the seemingly insignificant things, like little pink socks.

One final story. Yarely was a beautiful, spunky 10 year girl who had spent her entire life with us at the Children's Home. We were preparing to say good bye to her as her adoption to Brad and Misti in South Carolina was in its final stages. A brain tumor, growing silently, was also in its final stages. She was diagnosed with a rare form of deadly brain cancer and died six weeks later. Misti and I were there when the nurse asked if we had brought clothes for Yarely. Misti, confused in her grief, looked at me for help. "Her permanent clothes," I explained. Misti, Yarely's mother in every important way, announced, "We have to go shopping." She wanted her baby to be dressed properly. We searched the local mall and found a beautiful pink dress with a lacy collar, a little hat to cover her shaved head, and some adorable little shoes. "Do you think we can find some pink, lacy socks?" Misti asked. I thought, "No." I answered, "Well, they often don't wear socks but let's look." At the last store the sales clerk led us to the sock display. We saw a variety of colorful athletic socks but not what Misti wanted for her little lady. Suddenly, at the very back on the top row I saw a little bit of pink lace peeking out behind all the socks. I reached up to find the perfect pair of pink socks with lace around the top. The exact color of pink to match the dress. Misti beamed! The perfect outfit was ready for her only child. Now this is such a small thing. But, to Misti, it was important. The Lord looked down and nodded, "I get it. Here are your socks." It was such a comfort to Misti and a message from God, "I am right here with you, every step of the way." As we buried Yarely, we knew the Lord had been faithful in His promise of eternal life, that Yarely will hunger no more and thirst no more. Jesus is Yarely's shepherd and He has guided her to the springs of the water of life and has wiped every tear from her eyes.

Each of one you is God's precious lamb. Follow Him and dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen.