

John 10:22-30, Acts 9:36-43, Revelation 7:9-17

Today is the 4th Sunday of Easter, and every year the 4th Sunday of Easter is designated the Good Shepherd Sunday. We hear about how Jesus is the Good Shepherd and every year we have the 23rd Psalm and other scriptures which mention sheep or shepherds.

When we think of the 23rd Psalm, we can put it in the context of a funeral, which when reading after the resuscitation of Dorcas/Tabitha is where we may have gone, or we can hear the 23rd Psalm in the context of the gospel reading from John, where the Good Shepherd watches over us. Even this year's reading from Revelation reminds us of the Lamb at the center of the throne who will lead persons to the springs of life.

Thinking about shepherds and sheep allows us to think about the community that is formed in the fields. The shepherds live on the fields together, rarely going into town, rarely seeing anyone but other shepherds and their sheep. Although there were instances of girls being shepherds, they most likely were able to go home at night and bring their sheep into a fold or pen at their homes. But the shepherds in the fields, like the ones to whom the angels announced the birth of Jesus, lived in a community of shepherds and their sheep.

And we also need to think about the sheep as being in community. They were together day in and day out, mixing themselves up with all the flocks of sheep, not staying as one separate flock as they grazed. But at night they would return to their own fold, they would know their own shepherd's voice and they would follow him to spend the night behind a protective stone wall, with the shepherd sleeping at the gate to keep out the predators. The shepherd cared for the sheep, watched over them, protected them, claimed them as his own. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who does this for each and every one of us. We are his flock and he cares for us, watches over us, protects us and claims us as his own. We are his community.

That's where the reading from Acts comes into play. Being in community. Dorcas, also known as Tabitha, was a slave. How do we know? By her name, which in both Greek and Hebrew means "gazelle". Her name is a slave name. yet she lived in community with other slaves and widows. Slaves in the Bible were different from the slavery that was in America, they were more like indentured servants who were free to come and go, yet they belonged to their owner. Dorcas was important to her community. She was the one who cared enough for them to make them clothing, something they would have needed in their status as widows. She cared about the well-being of her community. Widows were definitely on the margins of society because they had lost their husbands, their providers, and a woman on her own, with money of her own, was a rare thing in those days. Dorcas made sure the people who were in her community were cared for and clothed. It's like those of us who make sure the people who come into our congregation find community and connection.

Community. Community and knowing that we belong is important to everyone. From Revelation we know there are myriads of persons in the community of God. Do you realize we are a part of the myriads? All Christians, all over the world, are a part of this community who are worshiping and praising God. We are under the care of the Good Shepherd, Jesus who became incarnate, one of us. Jesus who became the incarnate I AM in the world. Jesus who came to bring us eternal life, abundant life as his sheep. Jesus, who is the extension of God in this world, an embodied promise that we are his and he is ours.

And we are reminded that we bear the image of God. We are to be Christ like in the world. We are to be shepherds. We belong to God, in life and in death we belong to God. Everything depends on belonging to God. Everything depends on being known by the Shepherd. All Glory be to God.