

"Sheep"

John 10:1-10

May 15, 2011

When I was doing a little reading this week I ran into a really interesting question. Give it a little thought with me. The question: how many sports teams do you know of that have 'sheep' as their mascot? I am certainly not the best one to answer a question like that but personally I could not think of any. I know that you can get close with something like the "Rams" but that is a different thing all together. A ram with it's powerful curled horns ready to do battle with anyone who invades their rocky mountain home is a far cry from the little white lamb that followed Mary to school one day. Who would want a lamb as their mascot? I know that there are a lot of relatively benign mascots The Souris 'Blue Jays' doing battle against the Upham 'Orioles' – sounds like it could be noisy but not too dangerous or destructive. No I can understand why 'sheep' are not a popular mascot ... They don't even make a lot of noise - they are gentle, peaceful and obedient.

I know that I have suggested before that there are certain images from scripture that just do not have the connection with us in our culture the way they did at the time of Jesus. This whole obsession with sheep that we can find in the Bible is one of them. We don't have a lot of sheep around anymore. They don't wander our streets like they did at the time of Jesus. We talk sheep and shepherds when we go to church ... But perhaps few other places. Certainly, we do not want our school mascot to be a sheep.

I do wonder if any Christian Schools use the image. I saw a billboard recently that advertised for a group that I have to imagine was a school of some kind It was the 'Northside Christian Lions'. It seems a little odd when at one time in history the Christians were always being thrown to the Lions - but it sounds a lot stronger than a school like the 'Northside Christian Sheep'. . And then there is my favorite, St. Mary's Marauders ... Somehow I just can not picture Mary, the mother of our Lord being 'in to' a lot of plundering - still, St. Mary's Sheep, no matter how Christian it might sound, just doesn't sound like anything anyone would want to be a part of.

I know that I am belaboring the point but it seems an important point to be. Who are we as the children of God. Have we rebelled against the very notion of being sheep? Do we think that the shepherd wants us to be far to placid as sheep and we just want a little more power in our bite? Are we just not interested in being sheep or walking peacefully into the sheep fold or listening to a shepherds voice?

I think they are interesting and important questions to ponder. Are we willing to be sheep in a world that will only respond to wolves? Do we even know what it means to be a sheep anymore? Would we know the voice of the shepherd if we heard it? Have we simply forgotten the sound of the shepherds voice and don't know where that shepherd wants to lead us?

I read an article that talked about the bond that develops between an infant and the baby's parents. It talked about how important it was for parents to talk to their infant children even before they understand words because first the infant must learn to distinguish their parents voice from all other voices. The article talked about the security that comes in knowing the voice quite apart from understanding the words. The voice of the parents is [hopefully] connected with love, security, food and clean diapers. The child knows the voice and trusts.

The article went on to make a comparison between these parents and their infant children and the early relationship between God and His children. It said: "Long before we Christians can understand God's plan for us, we can recognize His voice." -- That is an interesting statement. But I wondered if it is true. Do we really recognize God's voice? Perhaps we could say that faith is recognizing God's voice and following where He leads even when we do not understand God's plan. But I struggle with the question if we really want to be sheep and if we would recognize God's voice? - - There is a cartoon that pictured a Sunday School teacher reading to her class out of the Bible ... One of the children stops her with the question, "How come I've never heard any of this on 'Sesame Street?'" Another had two prophets talking. One said to the other: "I don't know what to think - the weather bureau says snow, my big toe says partly cloudy, and the Lord says 40 days of rain." - - Another has a mother telling her baby sitter: "We don't want him watching any TV programs that have violence, sex, or any of the preachers on this list." - - Another cartoon had a man visiting with the pastor after worship saying, "Well, actually, today's sermon didn't quite fit my needs. Where do I go for a refund on my offering?"

Do we know the voice of the shepherd? Are we willing to be sheep? I read about two men were called upon, in a large classroom, to recite the Twenty-third Psalm. One was a published orator trained in speech technique and drama. He repeated the psalm in a powerful way. When he finished, the audience cheered and even asked for an encore that they might hear his wonderful voice again. After the dramatic repeat performance the other man was called on to recite the same words. 'The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want...' When he finished, no sound came from the large class. Instead, people sat in silence, a deep mood of devotion and prayer had filled the room. Then the first man, the orator, stood to his feet. 'I have a confession to make,' he said. 'The difference between what you have just heard from my old friend, and what you heard from me is this: I know the Psalm, but my friend knows the Shepherd.'

Oh, the voice of the Shepherd -- a voice of peace and compassion - a voice that seeks to call us away from danger and into the quiet of His pasture beside still waters. A voice that calls us into the sheepfold where we can be cared for and nurtured. But do we know that voice? Do we know the voice? Are we willing to be a sheep? There is a great children's song that says: "I just wanna be a sheep. Baa, baa, baa, baa, baa. I just wanna be a sheep. Baa, baa, baa, baa, baa." It is a cute song. But to sing it and to be it are two different things. To know the Psalm is one thing ... to know the shepherd is another.

A "Family Circus" cartoon has the mother reading the 23rd Psalm to her daughter. The daughter obviously stops the mothers reading to ask a question. "But, Mommy, why would

God want to annoy my head with oil?" It is sad that too often we misunderstand. We imagine that being a sheep in God's pasture can not be a very good thing to be. But God wants desperately to care for His creation. God wants desperately for us to be safe and well cared for. God wants all of the good things that we seek so desperately for to be ours. Goodness, mercy, a cup overflowing, green pastures and still waters. Do you know the voice that will lead you there? Do you want to be a sheep?

AMEN