

II Easter 2024

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

I Peter 2.19-25 St. John 10.11-16



Lady had a Little Lamb was the title of a 2017 episode of Judge Judy. The litigants agree to have their cases pending in Civil Court settled through binding arbitration in Judge Judy's television forum.

The Plaintiff in this case purchased a lamb from the Defendant. She realized she made a mistake purchasing the lamb after coming home to find her house trashed. She returned the lamb to the Defendant who agreed to return her money only if she was able to find another buyer for the lamb.

The Plaintiff regretted returning the lamb to the Defendant and asked for it back. The Defendant expressed her concern over the Plaintiff's ability to provide a proper environment to raise the lamb. The Plaintiff sued the Defendant for return of the lamb or the money.

The Defendant was never able to find another buyer for the lamb. Judge Judy ruled against the Plaintiff...the Defendant did not have to return the Plaintiff's money or the lamb. Moral of the case: lambs and sheep do not make good house pets. They belong on the farm, in their sheep pen with other sheep, living their happy sheep lives under the watchful eye of the shepherd-farmer.

Sheep and shepherds are mentioned more than 500 times in the Bible. We learn from the Book of Genesis, Abel was a shepherd who offered the first-born lamb from his flock to God who was pleased with his offering. His older brother, Cain, offered the leftovers from his garden and God was not pleased. Cain was jealous of Abel and killed him.

David was a shepherd boy who was very good with a slingshot. Psalm 23 is perhaps the best known of his Psalms...*"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. In grass meadows He makes me lie down, by quiet waters guides me."** In Psalm 95 we read...*"For He is our God and we are the people He tends and the flock of His hand."***

The prophet Isaiah lived in Jerusalem and wrote in the latter half of the 8th Century B.C....*"He will take care of his flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs together and carry them in his arms; He will gently lead their mothers."*

Ezekiel wrote 600 years before Jesus was born during the time he was in exile in Babylon...*"I, the Sovereign Lord, tell you that I myself will look after my sheep and take care of them in the same way as a shepherd takes care of his sheep that were scattered and brought together again. I will bring them back from the places where they were*

scattered on that dark and disastrous day...You, my sheep the flock that I feed, are my people, and I am your God."

Throughout the Old Testament God is the Shepherd who takes care of Israel. In this morning's Gospel...Jesus calls himself to the Good Shepherd who is willing to die for his sheep. He is reaching back into the Old Testament and declaring himself to be the promised Messiah. He is not like a hired hand with no vested interest in the sheep. The hired hand runs off at the first sign of trouble and leaves the sheep to fend for themselves. When sheep sense danger...they run.

Sheep are not very smart. But there is one thing certain about sheep...they recognize their shepherd-farmer by sight and they know his voice. They will come to him when he calls them. Whatever intelligence exists in their sheep brains...they know to come to the shepherd-farmer for safety. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who knows each of us by name. He knows us in the same way the Father knows him.

Jesus tells us his mission was at first to his own people...the Jews. In the Gospel, he makes it clear there are others who belong to him who are *"not in this sheep pen"*. He tells us he *"must bring them, too; they will listen to my voice and they will become one flock with one shepherd."* On Pentecost...the Good News about Jesus the Good Shepherd bringing everyone who answers his call into the Church would go out to the entire world.

In the Epistle, Peter writes to "God's chosen people"...Christians scattered throughout the northern part of Asia Minor in present day Turkey. Peter was probably in Rome when he wrote his letter during the time persecution of Christians was beginning to escalate. Peter writes God will bless us when we endure undeserved pain suffering and ridicule for the sake of Jesus.

Peter reminds us Jesus died for us so we might die to sin and live in a right relationship with God. John the Evangelist records John the Baptist's words when he saw his cousin Jesus while he was baptizing in the Jordan River...*"There is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin at the world."*

God's Court is back in session. The verdict is in: Guilty...but forgiven! We sometimes forget this and act like dumb sheep. We sometimes lose our way in life. We don't have to stay lost. Jesus comes looking for us...and now we have been brought back to follow the Good Shepherd and Keeper of our souls.

*(*The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary, © 2007 by Robert Alter, W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., New York, NY 10110)*

