

Community Church of Issaquah  
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Being Shepherds of the Flock  
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I never grew up on a farm, even though people think if you grew up in Mississippi, you were either a cotton picker or a farmer. I'm sorry to tell you, I am neither of those. To be honest, I never even visited a farm but once when I went to meet a great uncle who raised cattle. So, when I read in the Scriptures that I am supposed to be a shepherd of a flock of sheep, I became pretty intimidated. How am I supposed to make sure they get fed? How am I to make sure they are in a safe place away from wolves? How am I supposed to keep them from wandering off? You see what I mean? The task of shepherding has some very specific and likely difficult tasks involved.

It was always interesting for me to read the Bible and find so many passages that deal with the world of shepherding and sheep. Jesus called himself "the Good Shepherd." In the Gospel of John, chapter 10, Jesus is quoted as saying, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." And "I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me." It became a reality that the analogy used – shepherd – was because that was a job that everyone knew about and could be used as a good example that people would understand. That's not the case today. We do see flocks of sheep or shepherds in our daily lives today – at least not in our own neighborhoods.

But Jesus wasn't only talking about the comparison of four legged animals to two legged humans. He was talking about making sure that we as believers understood his role in our journeys and our roles in his ministry. In I Peter chapter 2, Peter uses the shepherd's role when he wrote, "For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." That indicates that you and I are members of a flock of sheep or followers of the Good Shepherd. Why do we follow this shepherd who leads us? Peter continues saying, "And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. There is a reward for each of us who choose to follow Christ as his sheep.

During our days as Christians in the church, we learn some verses that stick with us for all our lives. I know a few that are still in my head. As an aside, I should tell you that Rev. Rick Shewell memorized the entire book of Acts and can quote it when asked. I never got that far. But there are some verses that mean the world to me. One of those is Psalm 23. It begins like this, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures." As a professing Christian, I hold that truth very close to my heart. I am proudly a member of his flock of believing sheep.

If we follow the example of Jesus who referred to himself as a shepherd and us as sheep, why is that necessary? Simple. Read the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew and you'll find these words: "When he (meaning Jesus) saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and

helpless, like sheep with a shepherd.” Today in the absence of the physical Christ, the responsibility of shepherding is given to us, his followers.

Our current world, and even our own country is in a place where hundreds in the flock of humankind are being harassed and helpless. It was encouraging to hear the Episcopal bishop of the cathedral in Washing, DC, deliver a message saying that the need today is for compassion and concern. Sadly, many politicians jumped on the bandwagon of criticism of her for her message. It would be sad if that were the only attack on those who speak out for the harassed and helpless. Even the Catholic bishops who spoke the same message were attacked and ridiculed. But the word of our Lord is clear for us and for everyone.

Let me share a passage from Matthew chapter 25:

*“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, He will sit on His throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and He will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, take your inheritance, the Kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me. I was sick and you looked after me. I was in prison and you came to visit me.*

*Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you as a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you? The King will reply, I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these sisters of brothers of mine, you did for me."*

Matthew continues this passage of words from Christ by telling what will happen to those who do not follow his example of shepherding the flock. Needless to say, being compared to a goat and being cut off from the Kingdom paints a dark picture for those who refuse to do the work of our Lord. It isn't my intent or my job to be judgmental of others, but my daily concern is that we are under the guidance of a shepherd who does not honor what Jesus commanded and whose flock follows blindly without being in safety.

**Feed the hunger and give drink to the thirsty?** We live in a country where there are more than a half million homeless individuals and that number increases daily. More than 12% of the US population lives in poverty level and 35% of households were food insecure. As shepherds how do we honor Jesus's instructions?

**Welcome the stranger?** Last year more than 48 million immigrants, defined as foreign-born residents came to the US, or 14% of our population or 1 in 7 residents. Are they welcome? Only those who became US citizens, or are authorized to be here for work and many are undocumented residents who fled their country. This issue

is among the most divisive of Americans. It raises the level of hate beyond belief.

**You looked at me when I was sick?** 74 million people just lost the assistance of Medicaid. Millions just lost the \$35 maximum for insulin necessary for diabetes.

Insurance companies have been given permission to increase rates now without restrictions. My husband's monthly premium rose 37%. Is that caring for the sick?

**You gave me clothes?** Perhaps this is one of the reasons we make contributions to the Issaquah Food and Clothing Bank. Are we aware that contributions to Value Village or Goodwill are sold, not given to anyone in need. When we made our contributions to Tent City 4, those items were given lovingly to someone who needed clothes.

Each of us must at some time in our life realize that we are called to be shepherds for the flock called humankind.

Yes, we are the sheep as well, seeking to faithfully follow the teachings of Christ. Let me close this message with the strong words of Jesus found in Luke chapter 15:

*“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”*

Could it be that there will be the same rejoicing for a sheep who is fed or given drink or clothed or visited when sick? Let us give some serious attention to the role of shepherd. You are one. How will you tend your flock? Let's go to our annual congregational meeting and see how our plan for 2025 meets the needs of the sheep we shepherd.