

Part I Good Shepherd Sunday in 1994

When I was an Episcopalian, I preached in two different parishes on the fourth Sunday of Easter, Good Shepherd Sunday (Vocation Sunday). The Gospel for this particular homily, in April, 1994, was John 10, 11-18.

Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away – and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father (John 10, 11-18 N.R.S.V.)”

THE SHEPHERD

“Shepherd of souls, refresh and bless
thy chosen pilgrim flock
with manna in the wilderness,
with water from the rock.”

Hymn 343, The Hymnal 1982 (St. Agnes)

Since early childhood, I have loved lambs! Mother baked my birthday cakes in the shape of lambs. I remember a trip to White Sands, New Mexico, as a small child. There was a gift shop and I remember a small white ceramic lamb.

All through our home there are lambs (Gianna and others), pictures of shepherdesses in blue and their lambs, lamb candlesticks, and cards of lambs sent from friends.

I am very grateful for a beautiful stained-glass window of the Agnus Dei, the Lamb of God, which Terry designed and made for me. Christopher, a child at the time, helped with this project. Terry and I took this window to a little chapel I love and a priest friend blessed it on the altar.

Once in England, when Christopher was eleven, we were going to lunch, in Oxfordshire, at

the “Maytime.” Across the meadow were lambs peacefully grazing. I called out “Baaa baaa,” not really expecting a response. To our amazement, the whole flock came bleating over see to us, right up close!

A friend in Sonoma County, Marcia, once named one of her newborn lambs after me! I was very honored.

Today I want to tell you about a lamb who became a shepherd and about a shepherd who became a lamb. A dual vocation.

John’s Gospel tells us of John the Baptist, whose ministry it was to prepare the way of the Lord. John the Baptist looked at Jesus and told the people, “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29 R.S.V.)”!

This is what we, as baptized Christians, are called to do. We are called to point to Jesus the Lamb and to proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ.

In the Old Testament days, the people knew all about the importance of the lamb of sacrifice. You remember, in the very first Passover, the Lord told Moses and Aaron to instruct the people to take a lamb, a lamb without blemish, slaughter it, put the blood on the door posts and lintel of the house, then roast the lamb and eat it. According to Exodus 12,