

The Sheep of God

by Zachary Stefaniuk

Sam the Sheepdog is a character that adults and children alike first saw in the cartoon “Don’t Give Up the Sheep” on January 3, 1953. Looney Tunes used Sam to protect sheep from Wile E. Coyote’s brother in crime Ralph E. Wolf. Sam was very good at his job and was a great example of what a good sheepdog should be. Chases or scares the wolf away and watches his sheep through thick and thin.

Another name that Sam might have is Sam the Shepherd. When we look in the Bible we see the words sheep and shepherd many times. The word sheep appears 195 times and shepherd appears 82 times. Many times, the sheep represent the children of God and the Shepherd represents God. Sometimes the reader is directly told that God is a shepherd as in Psalm 23 saying, “The Lord is my Shepherd.” Other times we hear stories about sheep and their shepherd. An example is the parable of the Lost Sheep in Luke 15. We read that a shepherd has 100 sheep in his flock and one runs away. Being a person who cares for all of his sheep, the shepherd leaves the 99 sheep to go get the single sheep. The sheep represent God’s people. When one of God’s children goes astray He searches for them and brings them back to His glory, just like the Shepherd.

There are occasions where shepherds do not just herd sheep. For example, Moses was an actual shepherd for quite a while. He found it fairly repetitive to just hang out with sheep all day and occasionally go after one sheep that ran away. After some time, God had another plan

for him. Instead of being a shepherd for sheep he was going to become a shepherd for the people of Israel who were in slavery for hundreds of years.

Another example is when the Israelites were exiled from Jerusalem and lived in Babylon for many years. They were in need of a shepherd and Isaiah assured them that a shepherd would come and save them. One thing that caught my attention when I read this is the question of who Isaiah was talking about in this Bible passage? It could have either been Jesus or someone who would bring the Israelites out of exile. Either way both eventually did happen but we will never one hundred percent know whom Isaiah was talking about.

People during the time of Jesus were able to understand and relate to what Jesus was saying when he used sheep to represent people or ideas. They understood because there were lots of shepherds at that time and sheep were also used a lot in the old testament. That may be why Jesus and God used sheep to represent people so much.

Throughout the Bible sheep are used to represent people. One time which is more obvious is Chapter 25 in the book of Matthew. We hear about judgement day when God will put the sheep to His right and the goats to His left. The right represent those who showed mercy and kindness to those in need. The left represents those who did not show mercy or kindness to those who needed it most.

This summer, there have been many experiences that taught me about being a shepherd in more than one way. The first was being a Bible Leader at Shekinah for a week. The campers looked up to me and paid attention to what I had to say. The campers were vulnerable and would believe what I had to say, so I had to lead them down the right path, just like a shepherd would do for his sheep.

The second was learning about a sheep dog. When Patty and I first came up with the idea for this sermon, we went out to Lloyd and Loretta's farm to learn about sheep in general and the job of a sheep dog. These two creatures resemble our relationship with God quite well. Just like God, the sheepdog keeps watch over the sheep. And just like the sheep, God's people know that He is always around and keeping watch.

There are two kinds of sheepdogs that I learnt about through my research at Lloyd and Loretta's. Both are very helpful for the sheep and both care very much for the sheep. The first kind is the type that stays with the flock at all times. The other type is the type that may not always be with the flock but instead marches the perimeter of the sheep pen.

The first type seems like it is more common. Most shepherds stay with their flocks and then they would go after sheep that run off or go scare something that is trying eat or scare the sheep. Some of the more common examples of this type of shepherd are David before he was king. David would stay with his sheep through everything and would only leave them if a lion or other wild animal came and tried to attack the sheep. A second example is Moses before he

became the leader of the Israelites. Moses showed these characteristics by always being with his flock as well. The only difference between Moses and David is Moses was still the type of shepherd that stays with the flock when he became the leader of Israelites. David was still a shepherd for Israel but more like the second type of shepherd. This relates to modern day leadership because this the kind of leadership that Pastors use for worship and bible studies.

The second type of shepherd is less common but is just as loving and caring as the first kind. The shepherd still has the same job but takes a different approach at it. The sheep may not be able to see the shepherd but they know he is with them. The most common example of this would be the most famous shepherds ever, God and Jesus.

Another similarity between sheep and God's children is the sheep trying to lead other sheep. The result is the sheep not getting very far. There were many shepherds in the Bible. They were all good people. But because they were not God they made mistakes. Even David, who was the greatest king of Israel before Jesus made mistakes. This shows us that if we do what we think is best all the time, we will probably be led astray and lead others astray. What we need to do is do what God would want us to do. To remember this, I recall an acronym that I learnt as a youngster: WWJD" What Would Jesus Do?".

This relates to being a pastor because when pastor make visits to care homes or places like Bethany Manor. Patty and I went to visit some couples in apartments who do not have the ability ot come to church anymore and this was like being a perimeter shepherd. Going to

Coffee Row is another example of being a perimeter shepherd by not always going, but going often enough to know what is happening in town.

The final way that I learnt about being a shepherd was being a volunteer at VBS. This taught me about being a shepherd because like all the other leaders, I had to watch over all the kids in my group. If one ran off I would go catch them just like the shepherd did in today's passage from Luke.

God truly is a great shepherd. He has lead all of us safely to where we are today. Perhaps with a few bumps in the road, but God did have reasoning for it. At one point in my life I was wondering about why things were happening. Then I realized that God had a time and place for me and everyone in the world. A passage that helped me realize this is Psalm 23. I now will always remember that God is always with me through everything that happens in my life.

One way that we can understand what God wants to do with us is to practice Lectio Divina. This is Latin for divine reading. I read a book about Lectio Divina this summer where I learnt how to read the Bible prayerfully, contemplate what I read and to pray on it.

I would like to thank the Church for giving me this great opportunity. A special thank you to Patty and Terri-Lyn for being great mentors for me this summer. They have taught me a lot and for that I truly am grateful. These two have been great examples of what a shepherd should

be. They have always been there for me when I needed help. They have also helped me transfer from the pasture of High School to Post Secondary School. I also strongly suggest other youth to be a part of their church, it will be a life changing experience. Trust me, I know from experience.