

Good Shepherd Sunday  
Year C, Fourth Sunday of Easter  
8 May 2022

The Rev'd N.J.A. Humphrey  
St. Thomas's Anglican Church, Toronto  
John 10:22-30

Just before our family moved to Newport in 2013, we were given a going-away present: the gift of a colourful silkscreen of the Good Shepherd, which is featured on the cover of your service booklet this morning. (My daughter particularly likes the pink sheep at Jesus' right hand, while my son prefers an orange one at Jesus' left, by the way.) When I was at St. Paul's, K Street in Washington, D.C., I had commissioned a much larger version of it from a parishioner, the noted Syrian-American artist, Helen Zughaib, to hang prominently above the stairwell leading down to the basement of the parish house, where the Sunday School rooms were. Prior to this, there was a modest sign pointing to the Sunday School, but since the stairwell was around the corner from the main flow of traffic, and the Sunday School rooms themselves were hidden in the basement of the building complex, they were hard to find if you were a visitor. Even more importantly, their location gave the (occasionally accurate) impression that children were not a priority for that Anglo-catholic congregation. Since my main job at St. Paul's was to raise the profile of families and children, I thought a lot about how to raise the profile of our Sunday School rooms. In the previous building renovation, my predecessor had argued unsuccessfully that the rooms on the main level should be reserved for Sunday School and the adult meeting rooms should be in the basement, but the rooms upstairs, with their cherry wood paneling and marble mantelpieces, were deemed too nice to waste on children.

Thankfully, we had a dedicated corps of volunteers who brightened the basement walls with colourful paint and made it as sunny and welcoming to children as possible—once you found your way there, that is. And that's where this painting came in, as a way of inviting children and their families into a special space set aside just for them. Since our Sunday School program curriculum was called the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, I commissioned Helen Zughaib to decorate the wall above that stairwell with this image, as a way of inviting children and their parents into the space dedicated to the Good Shepherd.

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, or CGS, as it's commonly known, was developed by a student of the famous Italian educator Maria Montessori. (Another version called Godly Play is also well known in the Episcopal Church.) Both programs require dedicated, trained storytellers who work with children following the Montessori Method. Now, to be clear, I'm not suggesting that a Montessori-based Sunday School should be established here, but my first church had Godly Play and my second had CGS, so this is one model I'm familiar with, and I've learned a lot from it. I invite you sometime to Google "About Catechesis of the Good Shepherd" and read the page entitled "The Characteristics of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd: 32 Points of Reflection." But don't do it on your iPhone during this sermon—do it later today.

Among those 32 points of reflection, the one that struck me most was number 27, which reads in part:

- The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd does not seek success.
- It does not set about to be important or to impress others.

- It stands in solidarity with the least in the church.<sup>1</sup>

These characteristics are also true of the Good Shepherd himself, who does not seek success, at least not in the way the world defines success. After all, as we know from elsewhere in John's gospel, the Good Shepherd is the one who "lays down his life for the sheep." A guy who dies for a bunch of livestock would not generally be regarded as a big winner in life. But Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, does not seek "to be important or to impress others." Jesus the Good Shepherd stands in solidarity with his sheep, among whom are the least in the church and in the world.

This leads us to ask: Do we seek first to love others in truth and action, following the Good Shepherd, or are we more concerned about fulfilling our own dreams of "success"? Do we seek to serve others in self-sacrificial ways, following the example of the Good Shepherd, or do we care more about being important and impressing others? Do we stand with the Good Shepherd in solidarity with the least among us, or do we seek our own comfort and security?

I don't know about you, but if I'm honest, I *do* seek success. I *do* want to be important and to impress others. I *do* want to be comfortable and secure. Who doesn't? So perhaps the better question for me and for all of us is: In the face of the daily temptations to stray from the paths of righteousness in which our Good Shepherd leads us, what spiritual disciplines can we practise to learn how better to follow the Good Shepherd in our lives?

For my part, I've attempted to address this by being in relationship with people I know will hold me accountable and for whom I am responsible to keep accountable, always pointing to the Good Shepherd. These people include my wife and my spiritual director and confessor; the staff and key lay leaders here; and many, many friends, both within the church and outside it. Through these relationships of mutual accountability, I find that I am better able to tap into the grace I need to follow the Good Shepherd on the path that leads to eternal life, and I hope others are able to find that grace through relationship, as well.

Ultimately, following and imitating the Good Shepherd in truth and action is about listening for the voice of the Good Shepherd who calls us each by name in our daily lives. We listen for his voice as we seek to serve one another and the world around us. We listen for his voice as we seek unity and reconciliation with each other in his name. We listen for his voice as we seek to love in truth and action, no matter the cost. And we trust in God's good grace that "our Lord Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep," might "make [us] perfect in every good work to do his will, working in [us] that which is well pleasing in his sight."

Take a good look again at this painting of the Good Shepherd. Like Margaret and Andrew, pick a pink or orange sheep to represent *you*, and as you place yourself in the painting, remember that our Good Shepherd calls us each by name, and will never lead us astray.

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<sup>1</sup> From "The Characteristics of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd: 32 Points of Reflection," found at: <http://www.cgsusa.org/about/default.aspx>.

The Good Shepherd by Helen Zughaib

