

## How Good a Shepherd!

I said I'd never do it, but I got an i-Phone. Don't mistake me, I'm a PC man, but a number of years ago I purchased a GPS unit. At the time I thought it would be great to have one machine that was a GPS unit, a phone, a wind meter and several other things. Lo and behold, I almost have it. Oh, and all the other things I've got, too! I've got levels, and flashlights, I've got an internet browser, and I can do my e-mail on it. It can wake me up in the morning, and at my nephew's wedding rehearsal dinner I taped and videoed a whole song by the Mexican musicians! And with all that they say I've just barely scratched the surface!

This sermon is not really a shameless plug for the i-Phone, but rather for something yet all the more amazing. In today's Gospel lesson we read about a wonderful moment in the life of Jesus. The disciples had been sent out two-by-two to preach and heal. They come back tired, and Jesus sees that, so He calls them aside into a deserted place for a while to rest. His heart is full of tender care for them. But Jesus can't seem to get away from the office. People see them there and gather around. He watches the multitude gather, and He has compassion on them. He teaches them many things. They came to a place called Gennesaret. He moves through that region, preaching, teaching and healing. Wherever He went people would bring out the sick on mats. They would invite Him into the marketplaces and beg Him that folks might touch even the fringe of His cloak, kind of reminds you of the woman with the hemorrhage, doesn't it? And ALL who touched Him were healed. No exceptions.

This says something for those who came and were healed, yes, that they had faith, and they were blessed. But it says even more about Jesus. The life vibrating and humming in Jesus spilled out in life for those around. That life, the very life of God, the source and end of all life, was breaking into our broken and incomplete life, and the inevitable result was healing, healing in mind (the disciples' needed rest,) healing in body (all the sick brought to Him,) and healing of soul, for Jesus often linked physical healing with forgiveness of sins.

I believe with all my heart, soul and mind, that that healing continues to this day. The life of Jesus lives in the Church, and that life, filtered through our brokenness, yes, is still the life of the Godhead. That life is what Jesus came to bring, it is the gift to the world that He entrusted to the Church. In my mind that makes it all that much more amazing.

Why, then, do we not see it today? First of all, we DO see it. I remember in my Senior year in high school being part of a youth ministry team. One of our members came down with a debilitating headache. We all gathered around and laid hands on her and prayed, and within minutes the headache was gone. We prayed for a lady with a cancerous lump on her neck in my previous church. The very next doctor's visit showed it to be 80% reduced, by the second it was gone. Here at St. Christopher's we regularly see healing take place. Talk to any of our Order of St. Luke's folks, they will tell you stories. We DO see these kinds of things happening in the life of the Church today.

If we do not see it perhaps we choose not to. My son, Andrew, is finishing up a Master's in Theater Technical Arts at U.T. Pan-American, in Edinburg, TX. We went to see a play for which he built the set, arranged the lights and consulted on the costumes. The set included the side of a house. At the moment necessary, all of a sudden as if from no-where, Christmas lights came on along the eave. I hadn't seen them there—because they did not figure in the storyline. When I needed to see them I did, but not before. Sometimes we don't think we need to see the healing work of God in the world, and when it does, we miss it. But it is there, nonetheless.

Sometimes we convince ourselves that it cannot be. Perhaps it feels more secure to believe that our little way of understanding the world is the only way, that way we don't have to be challenged by anything new. Mystery is, after all, a dangerous business.

What is the key to this kind of healing? When Jesus sees them as sheep without a shepherd, His response is compassion. Our first lesson from Jeremiah summarizes what you find in many other places in the Old Testament: Moses prayed in Numbers 27:17 that God will provide a leader so that Israel will not be as sheep without a shepherd. Ezekiel is ruthless with kings that preyed on the sheep rather than cared for them. And then in Ezekiel 34: 5-6 God promises a new age in which God will shepherd His people. Now, Jesus sees the multitude as sheep without a shepherd, and He begins to shepherd them. He teaches them, He heals them. He is the promised Good Shepherd.

The key to this kind of healing is being a sheep in Jesus' flock. It means seeing Jesus in a new light. We see Jesus in many lights: As judge, or as a legislator—rule maker, or as some sort of mystical intermediary between us and God, or the sacrifice that forgives our sins. But none of these images let Jesus care for us except in ultimate terms. In this passage Jesus is Shepherd. He provides rest, He teaches, He heals. Two more images of this will come forth next week, but I won't spoil the fun.

The question is, can Jesus be your shepherd? Can you expect Him to love you as the Good Shepherd loves His sheep? Can you see His sacrificial death as the great gift of His love? Can you see His hand in the provision for your life? Can you see His touch in the health He grants you? Can you know His mind in what you have come to know of yourself, your world, and your purpose in it? Can you ask Him for the care He wants to give you? He is the promised Good Shepherd. He cares for you.