

The Lord Is My Shepherd
A First Person Sermon
United Church of Northfield
April 25, 2010

John 10:22-30, Psalm 23

Hello I am Jacob one of the shepherds who went to visit the baby Jesus. I thought I would pay you a visit and share my experience with you. I never get listed by name in your Bible, so perhaps I get forgotten? I watch over several hundred sheep out in the country on the outskirts of Jerusalem. Much of the time I'm in the countryside several miles from the tiny town of Bethlehem. Shepherding may seem to you to be a rather low-class job, but it is really very special. I think it is special because it requires a very special attitude of caring for the sheep. Sheep as you know are really pretty dumb, so they need a lot of guidance. It seems like a very simple job - just sitting around watching the sheep. But there's more to it than that. I have to be alert for anything that might go wrong. I can't fall asleep on the job.

At peace at night - looking at the stars

I think one of the best part of the job as shepherd is having lots of time to think as be at peace. I'm especially at peace at night when the sheep are in their pens for the night and I can look up at the stars. What a sight that is! If you're not sure you believe in God, you certainly will after a nite of looking at the stars! I'm thankful there are times when it is peaceful because because we live here in Israel in a very troubled world. The Romans dominate us. The taxes make us poor.

Shepherds have lots of time to think and reflect and listen to God

On these nice nights, when the sheep are in their pens and they are not wandering off somewhere - at times like there I can think and reflect. I can be thankful. When the sheep are at pace, I am at peace. When they complain, I have to figure out why and do something about it. If a sheep is missing, I have to go after it.

Angels visit when Jesus was born

Well, let me tell you about that special night when Jesus was born. I was sitting around the campfire to stay warm with some of the other shepherds then suddenly, up in the sky, there appeared angels There in the sky - these apparitions - up in the sky. They said there was a special baby who had just been born down in Bethlehem. They said he was to grow up and be the Messiah. Well, we'd heard about a Messiah, and so we were interested. So, we decided to go. We left one of the shepherds to watch over the sheep, and go to visit this Jesus baby. Bethlehem wasn't too far and on a moonlit night it is easy for us to find our way.

The experience of being at the manger

Well, when we came near the town of Bethlehem, We had to ask directions, but it wasn't hard. The Inn where we thought Jesus might be was on the outskirts of town. The place doesn't really look like an inn like you might find today. And the place where we found Jesus and Mary was more like a small barn where they kept the animals. There is hay all around and the place has that distinctive animal smell. There were cows, chickens and of course Mary's donkey. Quite a lot of people came by to visit. Mary was tired. Joseph did more of the talking. Mary didn't have a bed for Jesus, so Joseph had found a feed trough for the cows, put some hay in it and put baby Jesus in it. After we had been there for about an hour we thought we should get back to relieve the man who was watching the sheep.

Why us shepherds - reflections

It was quite a night. And it gave us a lot to think about while we were watching the sheep in the days and nights which followed. Every night, by the campfire, we would talk about our experience.. You might wonder why it is that angels would visit us ordinary shepherds.

Why didn't he come to Herod, or Pilate or someone famous?

I wondered about that too. Why should I be blessed with this special experience??

For one thing, we shepherds are very spiritual people. You probably think we just spent time drinking

bad wine and telling jokes. Some of us do, of course, but we are spiritual. That doesn't mean we spend a lot of time going to the temple. We try to get to the high holy days, but we are really very close to God because we can find God out here in the hills with the sheep. You see, we have time to pray and we have time to think and especially we have time to listen. That's why God sent the angels to us. We would be ready and we would be listening. Most of the rest of the people would be too pre-occupied and too busy.

Commendations

Well, I want to finish with some suggestions for you.

Listen watch - first - listen and watch, be on alert - God may come to you in some unexpected way. He may not come as a little baby, but in the person of someone you meet. Take time to go away from the distractions of work and every day life, so you can listen without distraction.

ponder - think about your life

care - We care for sheep, but you can care for each other.

go after the lost sheep

look for God in unexpected places

We find peace out here in the hills beyond the turmoil of the city. I encourage you to find those places you can go to or those places in your hearts where there is peace of mind

The Lord is my shepherd - be with the great shepherd, he will comfort and protect you always!

Amen!