



THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER 2017

All Saints Church, Saint Andrews; St. David's Church, Bay Road

"I am the Good Shepherd."

Well, our big adventure is over. I feel that in some way I have conquered my fear of driving in Toronto, since Canada's largest city was on our itinerary twice, once when we went from Peterborough to my brother's house in Scarborough and once when we had to go back to his house to retrieve the briefcase I had left behind.

Ontario is an amazingly large province. I still can't get over the fact that it takes as long to drive from Toronto to Thunder Bay as it does from Saint Andrews to Toronto. We didn't go that far, mind you, just to Belleville, where Meghan and Ron and family live, then to Peterborough, back down to Toronto then up to Barrie and Orillia, (in Orillia we visited John O'Rourke who used to be a member of our parish; he is now in a nursing home), then back to Toronto for a 'brief...case' visit and back home, through Montreal. In Montreal we visited Peter Bresnen, whom some of you remember, I am sure, from his visits to us over the years and if not in person, you might remember him as the artist who for many years painted the pictures for the Church Calendar we use. Peter is in the hospital there. We also jogged over to Miramichi on our way home to see Father Gerry Laskey who is in the

hospital there. You can take the minister out of the parish, but you can't take the parish out of the minister...or something like that.

One of the amazing things about Ontario is that the population is concentrated in the south, along 'the 401', and up to Lake Simcoe along highway 400, and you do not have to go very far outside the cities and towns to be right in the middle of farming country. A lot of people (as were Rod and Carole) are 'evening and weekend' farmers, who have a day job but love the country life so much that they spend their free time at what I am sure can easily become a second fulltime job. For example, the priest (and his wife) at the church my sister and her family attend in Barrie (St. Margaret's) have bought a farm where they have a horse, some cattle and sheep.

There! I finally got around to them: Sheep. This is 'Good Shepherd' Sunday, the Second Sunday After Easter. Both the Epistle, from the First Letter of St. Peter, and the Gospel, from the Gospel of St. John, are about sheep and shepherds. St. Peter, who was by profession a fisherman, (he probably didn't have time to be a hobby farmer as well), must have known enough about sheep and shepherds that when, near the very end of St. John's Gospel, we are told that Jesus both restores him after his triple denial, and commissions him, by a triple command, using the image of the sheep and the shepherd.

This is even more interesting when you consider that Jesus used this image to restore and commission Peter while sitting on the shore of the Sea of Galilee where he had just had breakfast a breakfast of bread and fish with the Apostles. The fish they ate was one of those he had helped them to catch, having directed them to cast their net on the other side of the ship. Here is what St. John writes:

"¹⁵ When they had finished breakfast," we are told, "Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶ A second time he said to him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." ¹⁷ He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do

you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. (St. John 21:15-17)

Before his death and resurrection, Jesus had told his disciples, "I will make you fishers of men." Now, as he prepares Peter to be the leader of the new or renewed church that would come to be called Christian, he tells his friend to "feed my lambs...tend my sheep...feed my sheep."

The son of a carpenter directs a fisherman to be a shepherd. What are we to make of that?

There are at least seven statements that Jesus makes about himself that begin 'I am':

I am the bread of life.

I am the light of the world.

I am the door of the sheep.

I am the resurrection and the life.

I am the way, the truth and the life.

I am the true vine.

I am the good shepherd.

Of these seven, the only one that Jesus really 'shares' with the Church (with possibly the exception of 'I am the light of the world,' since he told them to 'let their light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.') is the image of the Good Shepherd. Each of the others have implications for us, (for example, Jesus tells us that he is the true vine and we are the branches) but the idea of 'shepherding,' of guiding and feeding is the one that has special significance for the Church and for Christians. (Think of this: Ordained Christian ministers, in most every denomination, are called 'pastors,' which is simply the Latin word for shepherd. Members of a congregation or parish are often referred to as 'members of a flock.')

Why is it such a powerful image? First of all, (and this is what I have preached about on this Sunday several times), the image of the shepherd has deep roots in both Judaism and Christianity. Abraham, the first called to

be a Jew, was a shepherd. King David, his descendant, was a shepherd. The prophets spoke of God as 'the shepherd of Israel,' and David wrote the most beloved Psalm of all, Psalm 23: "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want..."

Jesus adopted this image because it was the most powerful image in the Old Testament, an image that depicts God not as an angry judge, but one of comforting and leading, of protecting and guiding. That, I believe, is why the son of the carpenter told the fisherman to be a shepherd, to feed his sheep. The image of the shepherd Jesus shares with the Church, and it is an image we should strive to emulate, to fulfill. We can do this by being for one another within the Church and for those outside, a place of comfort, a place of safety, a place where we are fed spiritually. The Shepherd Church is also called to guide and protect, to, if necessary, lay down its life for the sake of the flock, to seek and rescue the lost, to bring them back to the fold.

That is the challenge put before us on Good Shepherd Sunday. May God give us the grace to be what and who he calls us to be.