

Dear United Church Congregation,

As gloomy as the next couple of days of weather seem, we'll be glad in June when the ground is more moist than in recent years. I trust that this Sunday's Mother's Day will be bright and meaningful even if it's a cloudy day! This Sunday's reading is Jesus' third and fourth "I am" statements in John-- "I am the gate" and "I am the good shepherd". These two statements relate to one another because throughout our reading Jesus was talking about a shepherd who is good in all ways, and a bunch of sheep. This will be a repeated theme throughout the entire service on Sunday: shepherd and sheep. While Psalm 23 certainly proclaims God as the psalmist's shepherd ("my shepherd") who seems as good as good can be-- Jesus named it! Jesus claimed that his identity, purpose, teachings, actions, and authority were all good!

The problem is, many contemporary commentators go to great lengths to explain how down-right irresponsible and bad too many of the shepherds were (or thought to have been), and how "messy" and difficult sheep are on most days. Here's a fun quote from a devotion writer who apparently did a little sheep-field hiking in Scotland: "And the wool! The Scottish hills were covered in thorny gorse bushes, and every bush looked like it was wearing a sweater. Big tufts of sheep just ripped off, the evidence of thoughtless or clumsy beings who clearly needed to be led in right paths" (Vince Amlin, "Messy Sheep"). He was talking about the sheep, right? Anyway, you get my point. Is the point of all this shepherd-sheep bashing to try and keep us from sentimentalizing these beloved images in scripture? Or is it a way for us to pay closer attention to readings that have become so familiar? Or, are they trying to add a little tension to this theological comparison so that we don't limit Divine goodness?

Thankfully, Jesus is the one who led us down this path by identifying himself as "the good shepherd". He made the comparison first! Maybe we miss the nuances at times, but that doesn't mean we toss the goodness and assurance this reading offers out with the messiness of life. Even through (if not especially through) the gloomy days, difficulties and struggles, Jesus came and lived, spoke and blessed, assured and led anyone with an ear for his voice and a willingness to follow his ways.

May we really see and hear these familiar words this Sunday in ways that inspire us to believe and trust along our paths of faith. And, yes, may this Sunday be a really good day!

Join us for worship this Sunday at 8 and 9:30 a.m.

Scripture Reading: John 10:1-18

Sermon: "It's Good to Know We're Known"

Sunday morning classes will begin at 11 a.m.

Grace and peace,  
David