

Pastor's Point

I've been thinking about sheep. There's a cartoon making the rounds in which Jesus stands among a flock of sheep counting. Then he turns and heads into the next panel, leaving the flock wondering where he is going, why he is leaving them. And then we see the one, standing alone far away. Jesus draws close, reminding the flock that even the strangest sheep, the most outcast sheep, deserves to be a part of the flock. In fact, Jesus would most likely stand with the one, than abandon it for the many. Again and again we see Jesus choosing the most lost sheep, the most lonely and rejected one, and we smile because we like this story of the Good Shepherd, the one who leaves no sheep behind.

This is harder in real life when so much about how and who we are seems to be wrapped up in value judgements and herd mentality. We take comfort in being part of the flock, securely in the midst of our communities, our families. Logically, we know that lost sheep exist, that they stand on the edge or hide away in a thicket. But it's often hard to count from the inside, to notice when someone has disappeared or been driven off. Until it is we who are lost, who is consigned to the outside, never really belonging or fitting in.

In a time of isolation and anxiety, it's easy to become the lost sheep, to wander away or to feel abandoned. But then we remember that the Good Shepherd scours the countryside, refusing to leave us alone in fear or pain. He may lead us back to the flock, reminding us that we need to find solace in community. However, the act of return also points to a crucial truth — just as the one needs the many, the many absolutely needs the one. We need the outcast, the odd stranger, the awkward fit to keep us humble, to remind us that we too may one day be on the outside looking in. So your challenge this week is to consider the following questions:

1. When have you felt like a lost sheep, abandoned and discouraged?
2. In what ways have others made room for you, welcomed you among them?
3. When have you noticed something or someone missing from your community?
4. If you are the Good Shepherd, how will you invite the missing to return?
5. What kind of space are you willing to carve out, what kinds of changes are you willing to make in order to include those who have been excluded, run-off, rejected?

Blessings,

Pastor Heather