

There is an old joke about Change: “How many Presbyterians does it take to change a Lightbulb? CHANGE? We are gradually lowering our defense protocols, we are not trying to go back to normal. There has been nothing NORMAL about the last year! It is unclear if we will ever see what was normal again. However, what was awe inspiring, were all the people at The Patio Sale who stood in line with their \$5 bills, even more as they entered the Tents: who suddenly stopped overwhelmed by reality. We are with people! Without warning we were doing something we had taken for granted doing for years, and there were not authorities instructing us to be afraid.

Not only for the last 13 months, beginning on September 11th 20 years ago, we have been made to feel afraid. There is an Orange Alert, Take off your shoes and belt, empty everything out of your pockets; compound this by Mass shootings where we remember the names of the Timothy McVeighs and the Dylan Klebolds but we ignore the names of All of the people who like sheep were slaughtered. Last week, NBC News reported there had been over 150 Mass Shooting events so far this year, and it was only mid-April!

During the Patio Sale, we were shepherded: Please wear your mask; keep 6 feet of distance. But everyone were allowed to graze wherever we wanted to go. Someone shared with me before worship, that he had grown up on a Sheep Farm, and what no preacher ever names is sheep, like people do not like being shepherded! Someone else came to me on the first day, thankful, expressing: This was their first time out of isolation in a year. And gathering together as part of the Patio Sale, felt more “real,” than anything had in this surreal time.

What Jesus describes of the Good Shepherd seems so basic; do not steal, do not climb in through the windows, but use the door. Trust the Good Shepherd because the Good Shepherd cares about you. What Jesus describes is simply being transparent, recognizing what it means to lead.

This week, I proposed to our Session that we adopt a Code of Ethics, which had come from the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church 30 years ago. Ironically, after Watergate happened, the American Bar Association suddenly recognized that there was no code of Ethics in our Judicial System! Even more, it was not until 20 years later, after a series of embezzlements and abuses that our Church recognized there was No Ethics Code for Pastors; and in the Presbyterian Church we share the same expectations for our pastors that we have for Elders and Deacons; we have the same expectation of ethics for Committee members as for our staff. We are not talking about Nobel Peace Prizes here, simply To Tell the Truth, to provide honest work for honest pay, to be courteous and kind. But given the hate and disrespect of our world in recent decades, given disagreement about what is TRUTH, we have to be explicit about our Ethics.

With isolation, we have become increasingly territorial and defensive. In Africa and the Middle East there are differing expectations and boundaries. During the daylight, sheep and cattle are grazed in private areas, but at night, all the sheep and goats are brought into the Village compound together. In the morning, the Shepherd calls to their Sheep or Cows and their own, know their Shepherds’ voice. I keep envisioning that this applies to people who have cats... I have heard them at mealtimes calling their cats “Here Kittie, Kittie, Kittie” but it seems all cats from throughout the neighborhood respond. In the Middle East and Africa, children literally grow up with the lambs and calves, so that they know one another by sight and smell, trusting the sound of their voice.

The devil of this pandemic has been that within a few months of our arrival, everyone began covering their nose, mouth and chin. Do you know how difficult it is to identify people without 2/3 their face? What it has required is getting to know you by the sound of your voice, or by the sound of God’s voice through

you as someone we recognize. Part of being the Good Shepherd is being known and trusted, not as someone who just showed up, but someone known throughout hard times.

In this passage Jesus made a radical shift, from being the person of the Good Shepherd, to being the gate, which seems really odd. What he was doing was to emphasize that shepherding one another is not about the Title of being pastor, but the experience which changes us. With the mountains so close, there are several among us who are avid climbers. One of the difficulties of being a pastor is the toll this can take on one's own family. My youngest son was thoroughly involved in Scouting, from Tiger Cubs all the way through Eagle Scout, but as a pastor who works evenings and weekends, I never made any of the overnight camping trips. There developed a relationship between us as parents and pastor, that you parent my kid on Campouts and I will mentor your child through Confirmation, being there for them whenever they need. When our son was 17 he asked a Special Request: All of the Eagle Scouts who had been together since Cub Scouts were going to hike the Presidential range of the White Mountains with their Scout Masters, would I take a week of vacation to hike with them. So I said sure. However, the weekend that we were to begin, I had a wedding. While the Scouts travelled to their campsite, set up their tents and got a full night's sleep, I pronounced them Husband and Wife, signed the license then drove all night to meet them. I arrived just as breakfast was ready, and after breaking camp we began the ascent. I thought I was a fairly fit, man in good health, but keeping up with a group of 17 year olds was impossible. I struggled to keep up, struggled to reach higher and higher, to climb ever upward, struggled even to just put one foot in front of another. Finally I convinced myself that, we were going to climb to a precipice for lunch. If I could only make it to that precipice, I could make some excuse and turn back without causing my son too much embarrassment. But taking off my pack and sitting atop that precipice, I realized there was no way back down as we had come, the only way down was forward and through the experience. That is Jesus being the GATE, you cannot explain to someone else what your life experience of faith will be, you can only experience it.

Throughout this Pandemic, I have been searching for some time in Church history, where believers struggled with something like this before. Martin Luther, John Calvin, the Wesley brothers gave me nothing, when finally I came upon Huldreich Zwingli, who as a Reformer between the time of Luther and Calvin was appointed The Peoples' Priest at Zurich Switzerland. Zwingli ministered the Zurich's people afflicted with Bubonic Plague, contracting that Pandemic himself, which killed his brother and $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ of all Zurich. In 1519 Zwingli wrote what is titled as The Plague Song, that has 3 parts, the first at the beginning of the Plague when everyone was afraid; the second part when he was in the midst of his own illness; and the 3rd when he was recovering.

VERSE 1

Help, Lord God, help in this trouble! I think Death is at the door.
Stand before me, Christ; for Thou has Him overcome! To Thee I cry:
If it is Thy will, take out the dart which wounds me
nor lets me have an hour's rest and repose!
Will'st Thou however that Death take me in the midst of my days, so let it be!
Do what Thou wilt; me nothing lacks. Thy vessel am I; to make or break altogether.
For, if Thou takest away my spirit from this earth, Thou dost it that it may not grow worse,
nor spot the pious lives and ways of others.

Verse2

Console me, Lord God, console me! The illness increases,

Pain and fear seize body and soul. Come to me then, with Thy grace,
O my only consolation! It will surely save everyone, who his heart's desire and hopes are
set on Thee. And who besides despises all gain and loss. Now all is up!
My tongue is dumb, it cannot speak a word. My senses are all blighted.
Therefore is it time that Thou my fight conductest hereafter; since I am not so strong, that
I can bravely make resistance to the Devil's wiles and treacherous hand.
Still will my spirit constantly abide by Thee ever He rages.

Verse 3

Sound, Lord God, sound! I think I am already coming back. Yes, if it please Thee,
that no spark of sin rule me longer on earth. Then, my lips must Thy praise and teaching
bespeak more than ever before, however it may go, in simplicity and with no danger.
Although I must the punishment of death sometime endure, perhaps with greater anguish
than would now have happened Lord! Since I came so near; so will I still the spite and
boasting of this world bear joyfully, for the sake of the reward, by Thy help, without which
nothing be perfect.

Zwingli's point is that as God is our Good Shepherd whether afraid, dying, or redeemed, our lives are in
God's hands at God's will.

All of the hate crimes coming during Lent and Easter have made me struggle this year with Jesus'
crucifixion. Was this Mob Violence, an Execution, an Assassination, a Lynching? Personally, I love Jesus'
own description here. As the Good Shepherd, Jesus was laying down his life for his sheep, aware of the
significance of JESUS' LIFE for the Incarnation! Nobody took his life, the incarnation of God from him, he
had authority from God out of LOVE to lay it down in order to take up that life again. But I am
OVERWHELMED by the simple REALITY Jesus names: I have other sheep that are not of this flock, I must
bring them also. They too listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.