

Fourth Sun Easter A... Good Shepherd Sun

Introduction...

This has traditionally been called Good Shepherd Sunday...

What might it say to us who now live in the 21st century – long removed from a time when shepherds had any real meaning or significance?

Could I invite you to sing our refrain from the Psalm response:

Sing... The Lord is my shepherd

I Worth = New Worth

We live in a time when for many our Worth equals Net Worth.

Once in the past I was listening to Steeler Coach Bill Cowher on the radio discussing the players on the Steeler Team.

He facilely described how each of several players fit into the needs of the team, how useful they were, and some of their strengths.

One was a slow runner but he played fast,

another was good at pass rushing but not as good at pass coverage.

And, of course, the salary of each player depended on the abilities of the player – a player's worth to the team determines his net worth.

In our market society a person's worth on the job, their usefulness, will determine their pay, their net worth...

and ideally the more useful a person is, the more their paycheck...

the greater their worth to the firm.

A problem arises, however, when as a society we tend more and more to look upon a person's "worthiness", their "worthwhileness", in terms of how much they can garner in salary...

The more a person “makes” moves them up the social ladder,
into a “better” neighborhood,
with “better” schools,
and chances for “better” colleges.

I’m not saying that this is bad...

using our talents and having a good job and earning a good salary are
important and good in themselves.

But is our “worthwhileness”, is our “worth” or our “worthiness” equal to our
“net worth”?

I believe there is a tendency in our culture to answer a resounding YES to
this question.

Let’s Sing our refrain... The Lord is my shepherd

II Self Sufficiency

We also live in a culture which stresses self-sufficiency,
being captain of our ship,

being “in control”... or at least we have to appear so.

We have to “come across” as being “on top of things”.

We have to have the rite answers all the time,

and we’re not supposed to say “I don’t really know that”.

Perhaps that’s why the tragedies like Sept 11th so wounded the American
psyche –

they reminded us how fragile our life really is,

and that we’re not always in control,

and many of life's problems are complex and don't readily submit to quick fixes –

presently the Middle East certainly shows us how little we are in control, and how a quick solution, an "answer" is not easily available.

Of course, many of our own life's problems don't easily surrender to control and easy answers either...

a drug addicted family member,
a loved one who has lost his or her job,
death of a friend or loved one.

And what about the world's poor, world hunger, world diseases...

for example, those fleeing war and destruction... who end up being refugees.

These kinds of experiences remind us that we're not in control all of the time,

that we're not always the captain of the ship,

that we don't always have the right answer,

and that at times we don't do what we could to help difficult situations.

Trying to control a situation, or give a rite answer, or solve a problem is important, but so many of our problems seem insoluble. Life is messy and is more fragile and much more complex than we like to admit.

Let's sing our refrain... The Lord is my shepherd

III The Lord Is My Shepherd

Several years ago I was celebrating a friend's son's wedding in New York. I met with the young couple, and out of curiosity I asked them why they wanted to get married in the Church – why they wanted a Sacramental Marriage.

I was so touched by their reply.

They said that both of them wanted God to be a part of their marriage and the family they would raise.

They realized that marriage is not always easy, that there would be challenges ahead, there would be good and bad times, successes and failures, ups and downs...

They wanted God to be a part of that mix.

They said that they needed God's help with their marriage, and they would ask God each day to bless their marriage, their relationship and their family.

They knew that they had to do the "leg work"... that they had to work at making their marriage a go... but they didn't want to do it alone.

They knew that both sides of their families could be helpful in supporting them,

and that sometimes family relationships might be draining and not too helpful.

But whatever... they knew that they could not do it by themselves, and that they wanted God to be a part of their marriage.

Here is a couple that knew that they weren't the all-powerful captain of their ship of marriage,

that they weren't in total control,

that life would throw some problems and difficulties their way...

But they also knew that God was on their side,

that God walked with them and loved them and wanted to strengthen, nourish and help them in their marriage.

Jesus was their shepherd!

Let's sing... The Lord is my shepherd

IV The Lord as Shepherd of Our Lives

I believe their desire to have God in their marriage is a very fine understanding for us in our culture of the significance of having the Lord as our Shepherd.

We realize that our worthwhileness, our worthiness, our worth... is not determined by our net-worth.

We Christians realize that our lives come from God and go to God and that Jesus walks with us each day of our lives, whether we realize it or not.

We know that in God's eyes we are sons and daughters, brothers and sisters of Jesus...

That's what makes us worthwhile, worthy, worth something.

We have to do our part – we have to develop our talents,

and try to live as good and virtuous people.

But ultimately we are God's kids, and God loves us.

It's not our paycheck that determines that. That's from God.

We also realize as Christians that while we have to try to do the right thing and live our lives with some control,

have some of the right answers,

and be on top of things as much as we can...

we realize that our lives are messy and at times fragile,

that we aren't always in control,

that, as a matter of fact, at times we are downright sinful and hurtful,

and at other times we are lazy, or lustful, or angry too much, or envious, or greedy, or glutinous (the 7 capital sins) –

and we realize that we need God in our lives to forgive us, to heal us, to strengthen us, to guide us – to be our shepherd...

We realize that we will need to forgive others, especially the couple forgiving each other...

(The whole topic of 'forgiveness' deserves a separate reflection... I actually have a whole talk on 'forgiveness' – 40 minutes long... it's a challenging way of life for all of us who are disciples of Shepherd Jesus who leads the way.)

Let's sing... The Lord is my shepherd

Let's pray... Lord, come into our hearts right now, come into our marriages, come into our work lives, come into our home lives, and help us, walk with us, guide us, heal us, strengthen us, nourish us... be our shepherd.

In this Eucharist feed us with your body and blood, food and nourishment for our journey.

From the Desk of Donald Ware, C.P.

Help us to know that we are worthwhile and lovable in your eyes, and help us to know that our fragile lives are in your care, even when we don't have all the right answers.

Be our shepherd Jesus. What do we sing? **The Lord is my shepherd.**