

I think we have told you the story of the dumbest sheep we have encountered. Now as with most of our sheep stories this took place in Northern Scotland where sheep still roam free. Where we have been stopped for fifteen to twenty minutes as a mother and baby nursed in the middle of road—traffic did not move until mother and baby were finished. We were wandering the fields (an easy and fun thing to do in Scotland). This sheep was caught in the guy wire of a radio transmission antenna tower. All it had to do was back-up and it would be free of the entanglement (I have since been told that sheep don't know how to back-up. I am not sure if this is true or not). As we wondered what to do a man came along knowledgeable in the ways of sheep and got it loose. However, it immediately went back and got stuck again! (Our thinking was that it was a particularly nice "thistle" that was nearby that kept it coming back). But, regardless it was quickly in the same fix as it was just moments before, stuck – reminds me of some people I know!

As I read Ezekiel and I Peter I come to the conclusion that our task is to be caregivers of one another. We are to lead, warn and support one another in this journey we call faith. Our task is not to tell the other sheep what to do – they never listen anyway. Our task is to lead with the example of Christ. We are to do it willingly. We are not under compulsion. Peter calls us to delight in what we are doing. Watching out for one another, alerting each other to danger signs.

You know how easy it is to spot someone who likes the job they are doing. Two recent ferry trips highlighted this for me. On one the ticket booth person was jovial, talkative and seemed to be enjoying his job. He seemed genuinely interested in our destination, etc., and he talked throughout the whole process. On another trip the ticket booth person gave the impression that we should be thankful they were taking time out of their busy day to sell us a ticket. Don't bother with small talk, etc. just give me the money and run!

Peter and Ezekiel are calling for team work. We are not alone and we are in this together. We live in a day when support groups are all the rage and that is good in most instances. I thought of Eric, Rebecca and Caitlyn and the support group that they are involved with. Yes, we do support them but the group they work with is made up of other people who are dealing with a loved one with Rhet's syndrome. They talk the same language, have the same concerns and can share immediately what has and has not helped. Is this not what the church is called to be?

We are not in this journey alone. There are others who are willing to share the journey with us. We were eating in a McDonald's in Bacolod City, Philippines. We noticed another couple watching us – they were Americans too (we are easy to spot). Finally they came over and introduced themselves. They were independent missionaries. They felt God had called them to come to the Philippines and start a church. They were alone. They had no Filipino contacts, no support from folk back home. They were lonely, depressed and ready to give up. The contact reminded us of how fortunate our ABC missionaries are. We had a strong support system back home, colleagues on the field with us and a national group who also walked with us. (Our missionaries still do.)

Ezekiel calls to us to give the warning. We cannot control whether people will respond to the warning. Remember the recent fires in the Santa Barbara area of California? A mandatory evacuation was given and yet some refused to leave their homes. The fire officials had done all they could, they had warned of the coming danger and had ordered people to leave. Each individual then had to make their own decision whether to leave or stay. This is all we are asked to do – to tell the story. We offer the gift God has and then it is up to the individual whether to accept or reject the invitation.

As I have said before, the more and more I read Scripture the more convinced I am that it is dealing with our relationships with one another and with God. Peter writes that we are to watch out for and care for one another. We are to work together in community. We are to share together in our resources. We are to rejoice together in our worship. There is not a call for "lone-

rangers” of the faith. God does not call us to do the job alone. Of course, even the Lone Ranger had a side kick – Tonto. Lone rangers get into trouble when they try to do things alone. When people try to do things on their own, they often lose their sense of direction and purpose. They have no one to bounce ideas off of or to rein them in when they go too far.

One of the meetings I will be attending in Pasadena is for Communities of Practice. This is a group of clergy types who are concerned about our relationships with one another. We understand how hard it is to be a pastor or religious worker and how we need to support and encourage one another. Our hope is to get as many ABC professional Church leaders into such communities as possible. As many of you know I belong to an Evergreen clergy group that meets once a month to touch base, share and raise issues of personal or work nature. The group is bound by a confidential agreement to one another – it is here we find strength and support for the ministries we do. We are not alone. It is here we are held accountable to each other. This is one meeting I am committed to – I try never to be too busy to be a part of this.

Faith is one of partnership and working together. It means being a part of a community. The stronger our participation within the community the stronger our relationship with the community is. We work together using our gifts for the good of the whole community. None of us can do it all – we are in this together.

Shepherding is one of shared leadership. Let’s face it, we are not the shepherd, we are only the sheep. The true shepherd is Christ who we have committed to follow. Each of us is using the gifts we have been given. Thus our task is to strengthen, support and encourage one another. When was the last time you thanked someone for the job they are doing? I don’t want to pick on Mike but I wonder how often he gets thanks for serving us as a County Commissioner? I am sure he gets far more complaints about the job than praise. It is the same within the church. We often complain more about how people are doing their jobs than to thank them for the job they are doing. Shepherding is our working together, growing together and being a part of a community together.

It is our working for God’s glory and not our own.

I recall the story of a mother whose child wanted to try out for the class play. She knew that there was no way he would be given a part but he would not be discouraged from trying out ...he was determined. The day of the tryouts she made sure she had a nice cold glass of milk and warm cookies for him when got home. Hopefully this would take away some of his disappointment. As he came through the door he yelled, “Mom, Mom I have been chosen to sit in the audience and cheer!”

Wow. What a great teacher, director. But is that not what we are called to be in the church? Those who cheer others on and those who cheer us on?

Peter concluded this way (5:10-11 NIV):

“And the God of all grace who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen!”

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quoted is from NRSV, NCCC/USA 1989
NIV, New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1973, 1978, 1984