

“Absurdly, Wonderful Love”

John 10:11-16

By Reverend Art Scanson

A paratrooper who had recently resigned from the military was asked how many times he had jumped out of an airplane. He said, “None.”

A friend of his asked, “What do you mean, ‘none,’ I thought you were a paratrooper.”

He said, “I was, but I never jumped. I was pushed several times. . .but I never jumped.”

In today’s scripture lesson Jesus contrasts the good shepherd with a hired hand. The sheep belong to the shepherd. He works very hard not to lose a single one of them. On the other hand, the hired hand really could care less, as the sheep belong to someone else. So why should he risk his life for someone else’s sheep? We have all known people who have the same attitude as the hired hand.’

Like the paratrooper, the hired hand never jumps, he has to be pushed. Likewise, churches often have hired hands in them. And then there are those churches that have large percentage of people who have to be pushed to do what they know they ought to do.

We know from the scriptures that Jesus did not have to be pushed. While dying for the sins of humanity was not something he relished. He died an excruciating death. But still he did it out of his own volition. He lay down his life for the sheep. And the sheep here in the scripture are you and me. That should really speak to us.

This is to say that **we really do matter to Jesus.**

In another of Jesus’ parables he compared himself to a shepherd out in the wilderness. One of his sheep is missing. He leaves the ninety-nine other sheep under his care to search for that one lost sheep. He really does care, my friends - for each of us.

In her book, Holding On To Hope , Nancy Guthrie tells of the scene that occurred on September 11, 2001, when terrorists hijacked four airliners, ramming two of the planes into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City.

“The entire world watched in horror as the towers erupted into gigantic fireballs, then imploded until nothing was left of the 110-story, glass-and-steel structures except soot, dust, and a six-story-high pile of smoldering rubble.

“Even before the dust settled, the heroic rescue effort began as thousands of people systematically started combing through the debris to find the survivors. One rescuer told how he had climbed down into a hole in the twisted steel and rubble, extending his arm ever farther to shine his flashlight into the darkness, when out of the dusty blackness a hand reached up and grabbed his! He was so startled he almost dropped his flashlight and let go of the hand! But instead, he reached back for someone to grab his hand, then someone grabbed that person’s

hand, until a human chain was formed and the man trapped in the pile of debris was pulled to safety.”

It is wonderful when human beings reach out a helping hand to one another in times of great need. The source of our strength to do this is from God’s love for us. It is also the strength of an eternal God that sacrifices God’s son in our behalf. Yes, this is the essence of the scripture for today. A shepherd risking his life for a sheep. Oh, it may not make a lot of sense in worldly understanding, but it does tell us how much we are loved. And that we do matter to God.

Bruce Larson prints a hilarious letter from a friend of his who tells of having to deliver seven new-born sheep while her husband was out of town. He does this in his book, The One and the Only You.

In that letter she says, “Never again can I think of the Good Shepherd without knowing that he must love us beyond measure if we are like sheep to him. A sheep is smelly, with an oily kind of dirt that lingers on anything it touches and soaks right through clothing to give an overall aroma long after you’ve come in. One old ewe that I hate with a passion, since she takes advantage of every unsuspecting movement to assert her authority, had trouble having her lamb. Would you believe we had to pen her up all the while she was trying to incapacitate us. . . and then wrestle her down and sit on her head before we could pull the lamb? Then she was so exhausted she didn’t want to get up to take of her baby, so I pretended to get back into the pen with her and she was so anxious to clobber me, she got up with no trouble at all. And that was only one of seven we delivered that week! Thank heaven the others were less traumatic.”

Contrary to this story, most of us have that image of the cuddly little lamb, while adult sheep are not the most endearing of God’s creatures. Therefore, the idea of a shepherd giving his life for a sheep is absurd. But that is what is so important here! Jesus is trying to say to us that this is how **absurdly wonderful** God’s **love** for us is! God is so much higher above us than a shepherd is to a sheep, so from a logical standpoint, it seems to be absurd that God would love us that much. But that my friends is the Gospel - the Good News! God really does care for us—so much so, that Christ lay down his life for our behalf. It truly is an *absurdly wonderful love!!*

There is another thing we need to know about the Good Shepherd. **God knows us by name!** Our Creator God doesn’t just love humanity en mass. God loves each of us intimately. God knows our name. Jesus goes on to say, “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. . .”

Some time back, George Orwell wrote a futuristic novel entitled, 1984. In this novel everyone is under complete surveillance by the authorities, mainly by video cameras and monitors. As you may remember, watching over this totalitarian state was, “Big Brother.” And the people were constantly reminded that “Big Brother is watching you.”

Ever after there have been people concerned about individual privacy and freedom and have been looking for signs of Big Brother becoming a reality in our society. All the while more and more of our urban landscape is being observed by security cameras.

Several years ago there was a news report that Israeli scientists are now marketing a microchip that, implanted under the skin, would protect film stars and millionaires from kidnappers. Originally this chip was developed to track Israeli secret-service agents abroad. This chip doesn't even require batteries - it runs on the neurophysiological energy generated within the human body. ("World Watch" edited by Anita Hamilton, *Time Digital*, Nov. 1998) Since this report there has been an explosion in this type of technology. Farmers keep tabs on their cattle and work their fields. People keep track of their pets. GPS systems help us travel in our vehicles and keep track Alzheimer of patients who wear bracelets with chips in them.

The possibilities are endless already. If so, then why not a "glorified bar code" that would allow us to go through airports without waiting in line, or go through the check-out lane of the supermarket without having to produce our credit card? The list goes on - soon we might just see those signs "Big Brother is watching."

Here's why I mention all this. There are people who have no difficulty believing that one day the government will keep track of us all, but who cannot conceive that an all-knowing God can take a personal interest in each of God's children, hear each of our prayers, and be responsive to each of our individual needs.

My friends, we are sheep! No matter how far our technology progresses it will still be painfully primitive in comparison to the mind of the God who created all that lives and moves and has its being! God knows our name. When we come before God to confess our sins and our needs, God hears our individual petitions and is present there with us as if we were the only person in the universe. If you can believe that science can track our whereabouts, how can you not believe that the God who made it possible for us to have such technologies, who created the heavens and the earth, and who makes it possible for us to probe the universe, can be individually responsive to those who call on God's name.

God really does care for us. God knows us by name. So here is one more thing for us to remember today. **God wants to be our partner as we seek to cope with life.** Jesus compared us to sheep, and there are those times when we are sheep. But he also called us his friends, as well as his brothers and sisters. He told us to be yoked to him. He wants to partner with us as we live our lives.

The good shepherd cares for all the sheep. As those under God's protection, we can do no less. Which is to say: "Do no harm, do good, and stay in love with God!"

May that be our resolve.