

I will wave my crook to get [the sheep's]
attention in the sale ring and tickle it gently
under its nose to get to raise its head to look
prouder and full of character.

So writes James Rebank,

a contemporary English shepherd in his book

*The Shepherd's Life: Modern Dispatches from an
Ancient Landscape.*

Continuing, he says

A crook is as essential now on our farm as it
ever was. My crook is an extension of my
arm, letting me catch the sheep. Sheep are
faster than a man, but will let you within a
distance they feel safe at. The crook is used
to take advantage of that and snag them... a
stick is a part of what makes you a
shepherd.¹

Jesus, the Good Shepherd,

is invariably pictured standing with a crook

amid a flock of complacent sheep—

Surely this picture is to indicate the peace and safety

we, the flock, ought to feel in the pleasant pastures

into which our faith leads—

knowing that the Good Shepherd is

standing watch.

To achieve this serene picture a shepherd

has to be really good at his calling.

Shepherding sheep is more or less

like managing toddlers or puppies

– all day long.

Sheep can be unruly, easily lost,

they wander into danger insensible that they

lives might be extinguished any moment

by a false step into a ravine

or into the path of a predator.

A good shepherd

will track his sheep

enduring extreme temperatures

and chase them

through perilous places to rescue them.

James Banks, relates one

such adventure with his flock

lost in a blizzard

and it reads like a parable of God's love, revealing

the many ways we might stray from that love

and the intense, dedicated measures our

Good Shepherd will take to bring us home

to hope in God.

The snow is getting deep now and I have to
concentrate or I could hit things beneath it.
Troughs. Branches. Stones. Soon I'm at the
field where my flock should be, but I cannot
see them...I have to find them.

Have you ever been lost in sadness, perplexity, or fear

and felt abandoned by God?

God is saying, *I have to find her. I have to find him.*

The distance is small, but trudging through
the snow with a heavy load makes it feel
epic...We find some of the ewes quickly.

Their black friendly eyes pleased to see
me... They rush to my legs and start on the
hay [I have put down for them].

Have often have you felt lost in a blizzard of confusing
thoughts or pursuits only to look up and find
a concerned friend or stranger,
looking on you with compassion,
ready to lend a helping hand
or encountered that still small voice of God
whispering encouragement to hang on
food, shelter, consolation is
on its way.

I count the sheep, but it's hard because other
ewes are emerging out of the blizzard from
all directions. I struggle to get a decent
count, but some are missing.

I have a decision to make: if I stay here
much longer, the quad bike will get stuck in
the lane; I may get into all sorts of trouble
and not get back for the other flocks.

The good shepherd doesn't give up, however,

he waits.

Then the sheep appear from out of the
whiteness.

The good shepherd and his flock trudge home,
retracing the same perilous journey—
but all the flock are safe.

Brian P. Stoffregen, Bible scholar says:

I think that the concept of the Father giving
us to Jesus is one of the hardest concepts for
us to grasp. We are part of Jesus' flock
because of what God has done, not because
of anything we have done, (cf "You did not
choose me but I chose you" 15:16a).

Can we refuse to be God's gift to Jesus?
Jesus is clear that "the Jews" to whom he is
speaking do not belong to his sheep. Why
not? They refuse to listen and follow. What
is the word they refuse to hear? "God has
given you to Jesus."

I believe that it is the purpose of the church
to proclaim over and over again to its
people: "You have been chosen by God.
You are part of Jesus' flock. You belong to
Jesus. You are a sheep of God." The hearers

can choose to believe or not believe these
words. The hearers can choose to follow up
on what God has done for them or not.ⁱⁱ

We like sheep have all gone astray from time to
time—

been deterred by blizzards of

debt, sorrow, abandonment, or anger

Yet the prophecy of Isaiah reminds us

All of us, like sheep, have strayed away.
We have left God's paths to follow our own.
Yet the Lord laid on Jesus
the guilt of us all.

Not only does our Good Shepherd Jesus

empathize with us as a fellow human being,

as God's appointed crook,

he gently raises our eyes to

hope

and lovingly rescues us

from our fears.

Easter 4 – May 12, 2019 – Year C
Acts 9:36-43, Psalm 2, Revelation 7:9-17, John 10:22-30
the Rev. Deborah Kempson-Thompson

That we might become sheep prouder
and full of God's character.

Amen

ⁱ *The Shepherd's Life: Modern Dispatches from an Ancient Landscape*, James Rebank

ⁱⁱ Brian P. Stoffregen Exegetical Notes at CrossMarks Christian Ministry,
<http://www.crossmarks.com/brian/>