

AS-Easter 4 May 7, 2017 - ST MARKS HALIFAX – The Rev. John K. Morrell

God of mercy and God of joy –
we praise you for your faithfulness and your love.
Open our eyes to the marvellous evidence of your presence among us.
Open our ears to the one who calls us by name
and seeks to lead us in the path of righteousness.
Work your will within us and through us
that we may bring glory and praise and honour
to that name which is above every name,
both in this hour and in all the hours to come.
We ask it through Christ Jesus, our brother and our Lord. Amen.

[Richard Fairchild, www.rockies.net/spirit/sermons.html]

My sermon to you this morning is about leadership. Our reading from John 10 talks about Jesus the Good Shepherd. Our focus on the Battle of the Atlantic reminds us of the decisions made by the men and women of the Allied Navies and Air Forces who kept the vital supply link between North America and England open during the Second World War. However, I will begin with what is happening in our Mother Church this morning.

Rev. Vivien and her family are at St. George's this morning. It was announced last Sunday that their Rector Fr. Christopher Snook had resigned and will continue on medical leave for the foreseeable future. Christopher has been on leave since last September and continues to struggle with severe depression. His last Sunday at St. George's is this morning where he will give his final sermon in about half an hour. I have a card for our members to sign and take over to St. George's following our service this morning. Fr. Jim Purchase will continue as Priest-in-charge for an indefinite period. I ask your prayers for Fr. Christopher, Fr. Jim and the community of St. George's as they begin the search for new leadership.

Now here are two stories about effective leadership.

The first is called "Effective Leadership"

Once there was an ecumenical crusade that was being held in a large city. Every imaginable denomination was in attendance for this unprecedented event. One afternoon the gathering was in session when all of a sudden a secretary rushed in shouting, "The building's on fire! The building's on fire!" Confusion reigned as each church group came together and did what came natural:

The Methodists gathered in the corner to pray.

The Baptists cried, "Where's the water?"

The Quakers quietly praised God for the blessings that fire brings.

The Lutherans posted a notice on the door declaring that the fire was evil.

The Roman Catholics passed a plate to cover the damages.

The Unitarians reasoned that the fire would burn itself out if just given the chance.

The Congregationalists shouted, "Every man for himself."

The Fundamentalists proclaimed, "It's the vengeance of God."

The Christian Scientists concluded that there was no real fire.

The Presbyterians appointed a chairperson to appoint a committee to look into the matter and make a written report.

The Episcopalians formed a procession and marched out.

And the church secretary grabbed a fire extinguisher and put the fire out.

*Tom Lacey, Unleashing the Lord in Your Life- "Effective Leadership". [esermos.com
May 7, 2017]*

The second story is called "Beyond Fleecing"

The pastor of a rich suburban parish was speaking to the Sunday school kids. He told them that as the pastor he was like a shepherd and the members of his congregation were the sheep. He then put this question to them: "What does the shepherd do for the sheep?" A little fellow in the front row raised his hands and answered, "He fleeces them." True enough, shepherds go into the business for the purpose of fleecing, milking and feeding on the sheep. But when the Bible speaks of the leaders of God's people as shepherds, it envisions leaders who feed, protect and feel with the people as a good shepherd does for his flock.

*Fr. Munachi Ezeogu, Jesus, the Good Shepherd, "Beyond Fleecing"
[esermos.com May 7, 2017]*

Some of you may have been in England during World War II. The English government knew that Hitler was planning to invade the British Islands. They encouraged their people to prepare for the invasion and they did several things: they boasted their defenses, they put guards on constant watch, and they developed early warning systems and evacuation routes.

They did one more thing - the government passed a law requiring every community to take down all the road signs and any sign that named any town or village. They knew the Germans had maps of England, but if they couldn't locate themselves on those maps, they would be slowed in their progress as they approached London. Without any sign or any point of reference, the troops would just wander aimlessly around.

That is exactly the way most people live their lives... unless they find the right leader and follow him. On this the GOOD SHEPHERD Sunday we will explore together what it means to have Jesus as a leader or shepherd. What kind of image comes to your mind? We have heard this image of Jesus as a shepherd so many times and so many ways that perhaps it has become too familiar or lost its sense.

None of you here are sheep farmers, maybe in an earlier life you might have raised a sheep or two, or been to farm where sheep were being raised. Are sheep smart or really stupid? In the movie BABE they were actually portrayed as being very smart, being talked into following the directions of a pig as shepherd instead of being physically herded by dogs.

We helped raise a lamb once. It was many years ago at our ocean cottage in Nova Scotia. We were in the local village musical play that ran every summer in early July. One of the songs sung by the children - I got me cat, the cat pleased me, I sat my cat under yonder tree, the cat goes fiddle I fee ... also had a verse for a sheep, so we offered to provide one. We borrowed a recently orphaned lamb and took her back to the cottage. We put her in a makeshift pen for the first night, and she BAHhed and bleated all night long. When we brought her inside and she was very content to be in our presence and would quiet down.

For her part in the play, we would drive to the hockey arena and our daughter would take 'baby' out of the car on a leash, then would walk her through the front doors of the arena and back around the seats to the opposite side of the arena where she would wait in a stall. After two days, we could let this lamb out anywhere in the parking lot and she would head through the crowd of people and would find her proper place. She became the animal star of our play. We were fortunate that at the end of the summer a couple bought her from our friends and took her home with them as a pet.

Psalm 23 The Lord is my shepherd has provided comfort for millions of Christians over the years, and is still one of the most popular of readings in a funeral service, and is even memorized by many who are not practicing Christians. What a wonderful and serene scene this psalm paints for us... stillness, quiet, flowing water... But also is mentioned the rod and the staff, these are not instruments of calm contemplation, but are designed to keep us on the right path, and not always in the gentlest of ways. It is a different sort of comfort with the knowledge that our God will pull us back and even jolt us if necessary to keep us going in the right direction.

The Gospel reading from John follows the Gospel reading from the 4th Sunday of Lent - John Chapter 9 - the story of the man born blind who received his sight. The parable of the Lost sheep is told as a response to the lack of care the Pharisees showed in casting out the miracle man from their midst. As a 'good' shepherd, he also searches for any lost sheep, and he knows them by name and they know his voice.

Today, as in the Movie Babe and in most sheep ranches, hired hands and dogs lead the sheep from the rear. This is important, because at the time of Jesus, the shepherd always LED the flock, using the rod and staff to clear out creatures which might harm the sheep and to clear a path for them to follow. The shepherd was right there in front, and sometimes danger would overwhelm them -- they might be attacked and killed by a wild animal, or fall into a hole or wadi. Their life was one of protection and risk for their flocks. Keeping this image in mind, that is why within our church, our Bishops are called the Chief pastor, and I, as your priest, am a pastor to this flock.

As a shepherd, we know our flock by name and they hear our voice. We are named at Baptism, we are named in confirmation, and we are named in prayers when we have a need for help. We are named in thanksgivings for God's blessing upon our individual lives. We are finally named when God calls us home to the green pastures and waters of comfort, where the table is always full, the cup runneth over, and we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. What a blessing God has in store for us.

*Gracious God, be with us in your love that we may be your children,
at one with those who hear your voice and who follow in your way.
Help us to listen for your voice and do what you ask each and every day
so that our light may shine and your love be known everywhere we go. Amen.*