

Easter 4, Year A

If you paid attention to the readings and music this morning, you've figured out that today is Good Shepherd Sunday. I don't know any sheep jokes; so let me begin with one of the few religious animal jokes I know. It goes like this:

Do you know the theological difference between cats and dogs? A dog sees how well their master trusts them and says: "Wow, he treats me so well, he must be God." While a cat sees how well their master treats them and says: "Meow; she treats me so well, I must be God!"

I shared that joke with you because while I don't really know anything about shepherds and sheep, as a lifelong pet owner I do know a fair bit about dogs and cats and if you've ever been around the office during the week you'll know that my dog Lucy is actually a sheep dog, so whatever I know about the life of sheep and shepherds I have learned by trying to contain the energy of a sheep dog for the last ten years.

All over the world today people are going to hear sermons about how good shepherds are and about how dumb sheep are, the implication being that if Jesus is the shepherd then we are the sheep, and sheep are dumb so therefore we must be dumb.

Well, while it is true that Jesus described himself as the good shepherd, it occurred to me that there are animals other than sheep running around the field with the shepherd, which we might look to for inspiration. So I'm taking my dog Lucy as inspiration and I'm here to tell you that rather being the dumb sheep in relation to the shepherd we would be better off being the sheep dog, and let me give you 3 reasons why.

First, sheep dogs are much smarter than sheep. In fact a boarder collie from Germany was determined to be the smartest dog in the world because when being trained to fetch objects of varying shapes the dog learned to pick things out by the process of elimination.

In my own life, my dog Lucy knows she's smarter than me but she never gloats about it. So, I prefer the analogy of a sheep dog for us rather than sheep because God gave us brains and God expects us to use them.

Second, sheep dogs have a herding instinct. Anybody who's seen the movie "Babe" knows that sheep dogs keep the group together and move the group together from one place to another. In other words sheep dogs are more like the shepherd than the sheep.

In my own life, when I bring Lucy to the office each day and someone arrives for an appointment, Lucy greets them at my office door and escorts or

herds them in. So I prefer the analogy of sheep dogs to sheep because while sheep are prone to wander off and get themselves lost or in trouble, the sheep dog keeps everybody together.

Third, the shepherd needs the sheep dog for assistance day in and day out. I have no idea what sheep do. Once a year they get their fur cut off that's all I know.

Sheep dogs have a job to do to help the shepherd. In my own life, I started bringing Lucy to work years ago because when I left her at home she would chew my clothes or the carpet or even the door. I watched the Dog Whisperer who said that these dogs need a job to do, so I started taking Lucy to work and I assure you that she thinks she runs the place. So I prefer the analogy of sheep dogs to sheep because Christians like Border Collies, do better when we are helping the Shepherd than when we hang around in idleness.

So, as sheep dogs to the Good Shepherd we have been given brains and are expected to use them, to help keep everybody together rather than wander off in our own direction and we are to assist the Shepherd rather than sit idly by.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd, so the question for us is whether we want to be more like the sheep, or more like Lucy.

Amen.