

A Message from Mary-Beth

There are seven places in St John's gospel which contain the great "I am" sayings of Jesus. As Christians, we are familiar with many of them --

for example, *I am the light of the world* or *I am the bread of life*.

In our reading for this week, we have another of the great "I am's" of Jesus: *I am the good shepherd*. In this proclamation, Jesus is telling us more than who he is. He is telling us how he feels about us and why. This is a very personal description of himself.

I recently read a book by James Rebanks, a modern-day shepherd who lives in Cumbria. I was struck by the great care he takes of his flocks of sheep. He has spent decades breeding them and can easily identify his lambs. Not only that, he can identify lambs who have subsequently been sired from his flock. This is a knowledge of his lambs that goes deeply into the heart of their DNA.

In Jesus time, shepherds were also reputed to know each one of their lambs individually, being intimately familiar with each one's unique physical characteristics and temperament. So here, too, was a deep and abiding knowledge of each member of the flock.

In this passage, Jesus is telling us that He is OUR shepherd. He knows each of us intimately, just as a shepherd knows each lamb in his flock. He knows us to the very core of our beings. He knows both our physical and spiritual DNA and understands everything about us. For many of us, that can be very comforting, but also a bit *dis*comforting. That's because we can suffer from insecurities, fears and anxieties (especially during a pandemic). And we sometimes make mistakes or hurt people. This is not something that we want to share with the world.

But Jesus doesn't hold our vulnerabilities and mistakes against us. He understands our humanity and is compassionate in nature; he forgives us for our mistakes and our sins. After all, He sacrificed Himself on the cross so that we could be redeemed and granted eternal salvation. The proof of this is His Resurrection.

This was how Jesus showed us He is our good shepherd -- He laid down his life for us so that we could have eternal life with Him.

As we continue to rejoice in this great Easter message, we are reminded in this passage that the promise of eternal life comes from a Saviour who knows each of us to the depths of our being and loves us beyond measure. He is there, watching over us and calls each of us by name.

Here is a prayer for this week:

*Lord Jesus, thank you that you know me better than I know myself and yet consider I am worth sacrificing your life for me. I know that you have a purpose for my life and that you are calling me by name to follow you. I choose to follow you. **Amen.***

