

**II EASTER 2010**  
**SERMON - CHRIST CHURCH PARISH**  
**FATHER CRAIG LOONEY**  
**1 ST PETER 2.19 ST. JOHN 10.11**

X

Sheep, author Gary Richmond admits, are not his favorite animals. The zookeeper-turned-pastor worked for many years at the San Diego Zoo. Richmond goes on to say sheep must be God's favorite animals. Shepherds and sheep are mentioned more than 500 times in the Bible.

Richmond observed the way sheep acted at a petting zoo. The sheep stood there and let hundreds of children run around them shouting and petting them all day. The sheep were very calm and didn't do anything to stop the children from having fun. They would not have been able to pet the lions or wolves at the zoo.

Sheep are calm when they are in a safe enclosure and taken care of by the zoo staff. In their own sheep way they know they are not in any danger as long as there is someone watching over them. But out in the open, they are easily spooked, and go running off in every direction.

In the Old Testament God is a Shepherd who is taking care of his sheep. Isaiah wrote that all of us were like sheep that were lost, each of us going his own way. Jeremiah wrote that the people are like sheep which have gotten lost; they wander from one place to the next and can't find their way home. But God spoke to Ezekiel and told him he himself would go looking for his sheep to take care of them and bring them together again.

A good shepherd loves his sheep and takes care of them. The hired man in the Gospel is just that...a hired man. He has no real interest or investment in the sheep he is being paid to watch. He will do his job as long as he gets paid. But when he sees a wild animal or bad person coming his way he does what any sensible hired person would do...he runs for his life! The sheep are left alone and without a shepherd to keep them safe and out of harm's way.

Look at the niche above the Altar and you will see the statue of a lamb. The statue has been in this church building since it was originally constructed in 1870. We have statues and icons in church because they teach us something about our Faith. The statue of the lamb reminds us Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus is the Passover Lamb sacrificed for us on Good Friday and now he invites us to the Easter Feast. We feast on his Body and Blood in Holy Communion. What we do here every week gives us a taste of what the feast in heaven will be like.

Jesus is not just a good shepherd, he is *THE GOOD SHEPHERD*. He is the Good Shepherd because he was willing to do what the hired man in the Gospel wouldn't do...take care of his sheep at any cost. The love a good shepherd has toward his sheep goes beyond anything a paid employee would do. Jesus suffered and died for us, as Saint Peter wrote, to be an example of how to face our own challenges and suffering. Jesus is the Good Shepherd watching after us and making certain we don't wander off and get into trouble. We just have to listen to his call..."I am the Good Shepherd...I know my sheep and they know me".

Peter wrote in the Epistle that we were like sheep that had lost our way, but now we have been brought back to follow the chief Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. Peter was one of the first to follow Jesus; he was also one of the first to run and hide when things got bad. But Jesus forgave Peter and sent him out to be a shepherd himself to take care of the sheep who listened to the call of the Good Shepherd. The bishops and priests of the Church follow an unbroken line of succession from the time of the Apostles. Their mission is the same as Peter's: Be good shepherds...take care of the sheep wherever you find them.

Jesus is *OUR GOOD SHEPHERD*. Today is a good day to be a sheep and follow him.  
X