

# Church of the Good Shepherd and St. John the Evangelist

4 Easter  
April 29, 2007  
Fr. Bill McGinty

## **“The Good Shepherd”**

There is a sense in which today, Good Shepherd Sunday is the Feast of our parish. The readings are about Jesus as the Lamb taking his place on the throne of God; Jesus the Good Shepherd caring for his sheep and the Apostles following Christ's example set out to emulate their master and bring healing and relief to all who suffer.

Of all the images we may have of Christ, that of Jesus the Good Shepherd is enormously appealing to us. It is appealing for many reasons, not least because it is a non-threatening image. The Good Shepherd displays all those virtues of courage, caring and service that we admire and look for in a leader and teacher. The image of the Shepherd, risking his very life to protect his sheep, is transported as our relationship with the Christ who has come into the world to lead us towards a new way and a new understanding of our humanity.

Very early in the Acts of the Apostles we see Peter and John in particular begin to try out these healing powers that Christ has said are theirs for the asking. The learning phase of their discipleship is over and now they are out in their own. They only have what Jesus has taught them and they strive to emulate and copy what they saw him say and do.

In today's first reading Peter raises Tabitha from the dead much like Jesus' raising Jairus' daughter in the Gospel story. The people believe and are converted because they have seen a miracle.

That makes me think back to a previous Gospel story where Jesus says to Thomas: “Blessed are those who have not seen yet they believe.”

We have churches and denominations within the Christian family where the whole emphasis is on healing, miracles and praise worship. It is a trend that has led to bigger and bigger congregations that use screens and multi-media at the heart of their worship service. While at times we also turn to healing in our Anglican tradition, it never can be the only thing we do. We think of healing as a by-product of the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is perhaps why this image today of the Good Shepherd is so attractive to us.

It speaks to us of service and going out to serve other people in a practical way irrespective of what our job might be. The Good Shepherd speaks to us of police officers protecting the public in any neighborhood. In all weathers and against all dangers they stand to defend and care for the weak and defenseless. It speaks to us of Firemen or Nurses in the hospital; wherever we see that reaching out of one human being to care for another it has all the hallmarks of Jesus' teaching.

The Rev. William J. McGinty, Rector  
110 West Catharine Street, Milford, Pennsylvania 18337  
Phone: (570) 296-8123 ♦ Fax: (570) 296-4383

# Church of the Good Shepherd and St. John the Evangelist

At the moment in our parish we have six people who are seriously ill and need our care. It is a care that must go beyond just our prayer to include home and hospital visits, pastoral care and practical duties such as making sure they get their meds and make their appointments. However, that is but the tip of the iceberg. In the last several weeks we have been showered with requests for prayer that include accident victims, six cancer cases and many, many more. Do we lay hands on these sick people and anoint them with oil if we get the opportunity? Yes, we do, but in our Episcopal faith we also do something else. We lay these petitions before the Lord in each Eucharist, for we believe that when we gather around this table, this altar each Sunday, we unite with our God and with our Savior Jesus Christ. In that moment he becomes present to us Body and Spirit. Each one of our sick, whether present or not, are united with that Body of Christ. It is the Body of Christ that heals itself and brings God's grace and healing power where it is needed.

To me healing and our Pastoral obligation to pray for the sick can never be separated or divorced from this Eucharist that we celebrate each Sunday. There is no healing without Christ. There is nothing that we can do that can be in any way successful without Christ. That is why we include in every prayer the words: "In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit", and "in Jesus' name we ask this".

It is the Eucharist which transforms each one of us from sheep into Shepherds, because we are commissioned with this obligation to care for one another and particularly for the sick and the weak.

The Romans had a symbol that they carried with each Legion on every campaign and particularly when they went into battle. It was an axe surrounded by thin reeds tightly bound together and on top of the axe stood an eagle. The symbolism was that alone any one of these reeds could be easily broken, but bound together they were unbreakable and could not be defeated. That was the spirit in which each Legion went into battle.

As the Body of Christ, we should learn something from that. Church, ekklesia, in Greek means to come together, to be united, to be bound up with one another. Our presence at church each Sunday is the physical part of that Fellowship. But the spiritual unity that we share is bound up in the hearing the word of the Gospel and in receiving the Body and Blood of Christ in communion.

Two weeks ago I watched a Brian Gumbel *Real Sports* Show about handicapped children and therapeutic horses. The reporter told how the development of these little children accelerated once they were introduced to regular riding the horses at a ranch each week.

We were introduced to Maria a wheelchair bound little girl of seven. Maria is in love with Oreo, a chocolate colored mare who clearly loves her back. Each day she rides Oreo and then spends time talking to her. Maria says Oreo always talks back.

The Rev. William J. McGinty, Rector  
110 West Catharine Street, Milford, Pennsylvania 18337  
Phone: (570) 296-8123 ♦ Fax: (570) 296-4383

Church of the Good Shepherd  
and  
St. John the Evangelist

Last month, and for the 1<sup>st</sup> time in her life, Maria took her first assisted steps. “It appears,” said the reporter, “that horses recognize a child’s handicap and they go out of their way to help them. They are always gentle, always understanding and they never ever forget.”

Perhaps, in introducing us to the image of the Good Shepherd, Jesus was really introducing us to a rule of the universe, that if you do have an intelligence, you should know that you must care for the disadvantaged, the weak, the sick and those in need.

Not for the first time, it appears that animals know things before we do. Happy Good Shepherd Day.

Amen+

The Rev. William J. McGinty, Rector  
110 West Catharine Street, Milford, Pennsylvania 18337  
Phone: (570) 296-8123 ♦ Fax: (570) 296-4383