



All of us at any point in our lives can so easily get lost. We can lose our balance, lose our footing, lose our bearings, lose our vision, lose our support network or lose our ability to do what we always used to do. There are countless opportunities and infinite ways to lose our way, to get lost on the journey, to forget where we are going or how to get there, and sometimes we aren't even aware of it until it's too late. Or, we are aware that it's happening and we don't know what to do about it.

“My God, I think I'm lost, and I didn't even know it!” That's such a hard thing to acknowledge.

It's because we are so fragile, so vulnerable, that we are, on any given day, susceptible to losing our way.

We don't need to be part of an agrarian society to understand on some level Jesus' description of being the “good shepherd.”

It's interesting that he describes himself as a “good” shepherd. It suggests that there are

shepherds out there who are not so good, in fact they may be “bad” or poor shepherds. Those are the ones who aren't doing their job. If you can help it, they are the ones to avoid. The bad shepherds run away when they see danger. They aren't interested in protecting the sheep at all costs, rather they are more interested in protecting themselves. So the sheep are left very vulnerable with bad shepherds.

But the “good” shepherds are there to actually protect the sheep in times of approaching danger; to guide the sheep; to call the sheep, as they all know and recognize each other's voices; and to call other sheep into the fold who are presently not there.

None of that is lost on us even if we aren't sheep farmers.

What makes Jesus the “good” shepherd is that he lies down his life for the sheep, and in so doing he also becomes the “gate” to the sheep fold. Jesus takes on the multiple roles of being the gate to the sheepfold, the gate keeper of the sheepfold and good shepherd all at once. These multiple roles are connected through the idea of protecting the sheep at *all* costs and not allowing them to get

lost. If they do get lost, this good shepherd goes out to search for them. All of that is costly.

It is helpful to visualize how gates in sheepfolds work, particularly if you are becoming the gate and the gate keeper. A good shepherd, Jesus says, lays down his life for the sheep. As the gate, this is precisely what good shepherds do. They literally lie down across the opening to the sheepfold, so the only way into this fold is to go through the gate, which is this shepherd who is lying across the threshold, or the entrance to the fold. If there is anyone who threatens the sheep, the shepherd, who is lying across the entrance to the fold will fend them off. The only way in is literally “through” this shepherd, this gate. The ones who “climb in by another way” are thieves and bandits, who are only there to steal, kill and destroy the sheep.

The other thing that a good gate keeper does is inspect the sheep coming in to the fold for any traces of infection - particularly around the eyes and the ears. If any infection enters the fold, it can spread like wild fire and destroy the entire flock. If there is a sign of infection, the shepherd will anoint the area with oils and anointment - “thou hast anointed my head with oil.” It is both

an anointing for healing and an anointing for being royal. It is what happens at a coronation, and at our baptism. We are anointed.

But the other wonderful thing about this “good” shepherd is that the sheep know his voice. So there is complete freedom for the sheep to come and go as they wish because, as Jesus says, those sheep follow my voice are saved when they get lost. They learn to listen to the voice of this shepherd.

So if Jesus is the good shepherd, how do you learn to recognize his voice? It is so important to know the voice of the Good Shepherd, so when you do get lost - and we all do - you can follow his voice out of danger and get back into the fold and the pasture. There are so many competing voices for our attention, but they aren't voices necessarily for our well being, and they aren't voices that will be there when we need them. Perhaps that is why our altar window, like so many altar windows, depict the image of Jesus as the “Good Shepherd” as if to say, follow this One.

“The sheep follow him because they know his voice.” Learn to know the voice of this good shepherd and you will find your way.