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Flock of Lost and Found

By the Rev. Salying Wong

In the beginning was the Word. The Word was the Good Shepherd. He came to his own, but his own were lost: some in ditches of darkness, some in brambles of blindness, some on long roads of loneliness. The Good Shepherd searched and called the sheep each by name. Be it Peter or John or Thomas or Lazarus or Martha or Mary; be it the woman at the well, or the man crippled at the pool, or the man born blind, none of the sheep were anonymous. All were called by their true name, which was the name, "Beloved." When the sheep followed the Shepherd out of the ditches of darkness, out of the brambles of blindness, out of the long roads of loneliness, they became disciples. They passed through the gate of belonging; they learned the Way to the Father's fold. Jesus said, "I am the Gate. I am the Good Shepherd. I am the Way, the Truth and the Life."

In the Gospel of John, the disciples are called by Jesus, not to perform great acts, but to listen to him, to listen *for* him. The image is a searching Shepherd for his lost and confused sheep. The Shepherd is collecting sheep for the great Flock of the Lost-and-Found. The calling by name draws their attention to their own lost-ness and their own found-ness. Ultimately, the Shepherd's goal is not to set the disciples on a project or a job to be done, but to bring disciples into relationship with the Shepherd and give them belonging to the flock. This relationship with God will produce a life of abundant belonging to God and to one another. This is the abundant life. In fact, this is eternal life.

One such sheep was a man born blind. One day, Jesus found him and put mud on his eyes and gave him sight. But this sight was only a beginning; it was a sign of greater things than physical sight. It was a sign that he will see who Jesus really is, the Good Shepherd. His destiny is to follow the voice of the Shepherd and be added to the Flock of Lost-and-Found.

The man who was healed of blindness was interrogated multiple times by the religious leaders. You see, even though the religious leaders could physically see, they were blind—not from birth, but by obstinate choice. They wanted to remain exactly as they were. They did not see themselves as stupid sheep, needing anyone to lead them out of ditches and brambles and loneliness. No, they were educated and knew better. If things were dark, then they would shine a light with their intellect. They will find their own way out, thank you very much.

After one interrogation, the man who was healed of blindness said, “How could Jesus not be from God if he healed me? He must be from God.” The leaders took umbrage that an uneducated man was teaching them about God. They exclaimed, “How dare you teach us?! You were the one who was blind and it was because of your sins and the sin of your parents. We are not blind, are we?” And so their blindness remained. They would not follow Jesus out of the ditches they dug themselves, out of the brambles they planted, out of the loneliness they nursed like a wounded patient. They kicked the healed man out of their synagogue.

But our healed man is maturing from a lamb to a sheep; the miracle of healing is maturing into a sign of who Jesus is. He not only physically sees, but can now see spiritually and recognize God in his midst. He knows the voice of the Shepherd and follows. He understands that the Shepherd has searched for him and found him again and again—first, along the way, then after the interrogations with the leaders when he was kicked out of the synagogue. He was told he did not belong. At first, this was painful. But, he now understands that he belongs to Jesus and to the Flock of Lost and Found.

The Good Shepherd tells us that he is not finished with his work of finding the sheep. He has other sheep. He will also find them. He will call them each by name. When they yield to his call, he will scoop them up in his arms, he will speak tenderly to them, and he will add them to the great Flock of Lost and Found. There will be one flock and one Shepherd. When danger abounds, the Shepherd will ward off evil, will die for them, and rise again for them. He will always be with them to nourish them with belonging.

The example of the once blind man is an example of us. When have you felt rejected? Have you felt lost? What would it mean to belong in God and in the flock, not as one decision to be made, but a practice in one's whole life? Jesus said, it is like a branch that abides in the main vine. The vine feeds the branch as long as the branch abides. There's nothing else to do but belong. Abundance will produce of its own accord. Abiding is the harder work. It takes daily surrender and trust in the dark ditches, in the painful brambles, in the empty heart. The Good Shepherd is still calling his sheep, calling each by name. Listen to his voice, the one who calls you by your true name, "Beloved."