

December 2018

*We're all like sheep who've wandered off and gotten lost.
We've all done our own thing, gone our own way.
Isaiah 53: 6a, The Message*

Greetings,

On my recent trip home, I got together with a friend who had just returned from making a retreat. Janet's month of quietness and contemplation had taken place amongst the rugged hills of Brecon in Wales. Her closest companions were a flock of 22 sheep and Janet has stories – and photos – to challenge our assumptions about these woolly mammals.

Unless we come from an agricultural community, most of our ovine knowledge is from the Bible. It teaches us that sheep tend to wander off and get lost a lot. Scripture suggests that this tendency is primarily due to moral failure! (Compounded by intellectual deficiencies.) Janet's observations counteract that view.

Sheep, apparently, live by the rule that the “grass is always greener.” This can involve wandering off, or poking one's head through wire fencing for a leisurely lunch, or elbowing other sheep out of the way to enjoy a tasty morsel. There's certainly some greed and selfishness in the ovine community! This is probably what the Bible identified as sin. Unfortunately, human sheep do far worse things that push one another out of the way at the buffet table! Sheep “sin” is nothing compared to the human variety.

But more than their desire for the greenest grass, sheep love to investigate new things. At the edge of their field in Wales, an art barn was being constructed. At various times, a ladder, a cement mixer and a JCB digger were on their premises. All three were closely examined by the flock. In particular, the digger aroused

their interest and they vied with one another to try and climb in its bucket. (I've seen the photos!!)

I'm struck by the curiosity of the sheep. Who knew that they were fascinated by machinery! It seems to me that their curious nature offers profound insight into the human condition. Maybe, this same inquisitiveness is what gets us into trouble...

We wonder how we can improve the quality of our lives – or the quantity of our income. We puzzle over our purpose and speculate about life's highest meaning. And then we do totally daft things trying to answer those questions! Think: mind-altering drugs or potentially fortune-changing lottery tickets. Or: eliminating a particular type of person who is “standing in the way” of my personal success. At a fundamental level, all sin is an attempt to answer questions about improving our lot in life.

Jesus said that his mission was to help people find “abundant life.” He wanted men and women to know that happiness and fulfillment can best be found by living in close relationship with the Holy One. Life with God is richer and more rewarding than any amount of money or success. It is like the greenest of grass and a ride in a digger all rolled into one!!

As we enter the season of expectation of Jesus' coming, let us remember that his purpose was to make our lives better. Why not let him begin this Advent?

*I came so that they could have life—
indeed, so that they could live life to the fullest.
John 10:10b Common English Bible*

Wishing you a blessed Advent,

Brenda