

Saturday April 28th 2018

All in an April Evening



I looked at the lectionary for this weekend and found that it is about Jesus the Good Shepherd. Now I have many strange habits, and one of them is collecting sheep. I have numerous sheep of all shapes and sizes, plus countless sheep puppets, not to mention all my pictures. I even have a bungee-jumping sheep from New Zealand!

I am also fascinated by the fact that we use sheep language in church when many of us are not exactly in rural situations. Congregations are called flocks, we have pastors and pastoral visitors (all from the word 'pastoral', as in pasture land for sheep). Bishops carry shepherd crooks, and we have a lot of biblical imagery that goes with sheep and shepherds.

But I have a memory about sheep that has never left me. In my first appointment, too many years ago now to want to recall how long it is, I remember our Choir on a hot July evening singing as their anthem 'All in an April Evening'. It was totally inappropriate for the time of year, the season and the subject matter of the service, so it was all very odd.

I wasn't taking the service, but being in the congregation I wondered why it had been chosen, so I asked one of the choir members. Well it was like opening a can of worms! Not that I have ever done that, but it unleashed a fury of anger that the choir had not been given the opportunity to sing this anthem in April and instead of coming and saying something, they had got themselves so upset that it had finally come to a head in the July when they decided to sing it because they liked it even though it didn't fit with the theme of the service!

So this is just to give you fair warning that if this is your favourite anthem then you have only a couple more days left to sing it until next year!

Thinking about those choir members reminded me that I have met the odd angry and aggressive sheep too, but on the whole there is something tranquil about a field of sheep, and my mental picture of the countryside is that of fields of sheep and the gentle sounds of baaing and of lambs playing. However that idyllic scene is not the reality when I think of myself as one of the sheep that went astray, and of Christ giving his life to save me. For Jesus is both shepherd and the Lamb of God. As a shepherd he is the leader and provider of food, rest, healing, water and protection, and yet he is also the sacrifice that was given for us; and through the giving of his life our God, in love, seeks us out and brings us back home.

I don't have to wait for an April evening to tell myself that: it's a truth for every day of the year and the message is never out of season!

Jesus, Shepherd, thank you for your care of me, you take me to green pastures, you feed me good things, you heal me, what more could you have done to show me how much I mean to you, and you did for as the Lamb of God giving your life for me. Bless you Jesus. Amen

*Prayers for April written by Denise Creed.
Image: from the internet*