

The Story of the Shepherds
December 13, 2015
St. Andrew's United Church, Sudbury

MV #97 Listen God is Calling

(sung twice – white gift narrative/drama to follow)

1)

Today we are going to share our White Gift drama in a little different way. We have asked an array of shepherds to help us today. Shepherds are part of the Christmas Story, yet we do not spend much time on who they are or what they offer. We like to focus on the majestic robes, and rich gifts, that the Magi brought to the manger scene. Or maybe we think about the long trek of Mary and Joseph, and the struggle to travel over many miles via a donkey. We even may focus on the manger and the birth of a child, for a baby always brings hope and excitement to those who gather in the presence of that new life.

But shepherds? Why would we focus on them?

Today we hope you will understand why we would focus on shepherds.

Shepherds represent the working class of the day. They were not important people – not in how they were viewed, at any rate. Shepherds (for the most part) were taken for granted. They worked for little money, and even less recognition. They were seen as unimportant -- that is, they were seen as unimportant until they were not available to care for the herds on hillsides and in valleys, then sheep owners appreciated (even in a small way) their value to society.

Have you been a person who worked hard, and who served in the shadow of others? Do you feel at times what you have to offer is taken for granted, even dismissed by those around you? Do you feel you live a life that has value and importance for you and for those around you, but may not be publicly acknowledged?

If so, put your hand up and one of our shepherds will provide you with a sheep lovingly made by Catherine Somerville and Marian McKnight. This sheep is to remind you of the care and commitment you show each and every day.

VU #9 People, Look East (choir sings verse one as sheep are presented)

2)

Are you a nurturing person? You may be a person who works in the service industry, or your profession may be to care for the health and well-being of others. You may be the type who offers encouragement to whomever you meet. Are you, or have you been, a teacher? Are you a coach? Maybe you are a leader or mentor of others. Shepherds are caring individuals. Their care for the sheep is legendary. They will go to great lengths to help a lost or injured sheep. They would sleep on the hillsides or travel great distances to be with their sheep.

Are you a nurturing person, who cares for others? Are there other people relying on you to care for them and nurture them? Are there individuals who know that they need your help when life becomes difficult?

If so, put your hand up and one of our shepherds will provide you with a sheep to remind you of the care and commitment you show each and every day.

VU #9 People, Look East (choir sings verse two as sheep are presented)

3)

Shepherds live their commitment. It is one thing to make a commitment – to say that we will do something, but it is another to follow through, to live that commitment by doing what we agree to do. Shepherds quietly and efficiently do what they are expected to do.

Have you faced the situation with a ewe in the midst of delivering a lamb and running into difficulty with the birth? A shepherd knows what that is like, and will be there. What if a wild animal is seen in the area, and threatens the well-being of the flock? The shepherd is there to care for the animals under his or her responsibility.

When the terrain is uneven and diverse, and sheep can be spread over hillsides without fencing to control them, a reliable shepherd is what is needed.

Do you live your commitments no matter what comes your way? Are you a person who is asked to do just one more thing even when you seem too busy already, and you gladly say 'yes'?

If so, put your hand up and one of our shepherds will provide you with a sheep to remind you of the care and commitment you show each and every day.

VU #9 People, Look East (choir sings verse three as sheep are presented)

4)

A shepherd reminds us what it is like to be part of a family. Shepherds see their flock as part of who they are. They know the sheep depend on them, but they also know that without the sheep, they are nothing. Families can be like that. Brothers and sisters are to look out for one another. Parents care for their children, and children are attentive to the needs of their aging parents. Anyone who appreciates that it is important to care for one another in our families, in our neighbourhoods, and in our world at large, knows what it is like to be a shepherd.

Do you look out for your children or grandchildren? Do you help a brother or sister, a neighbour or friend? Do you care for an aging relative? Are you quick to help someone else facing challenges? Are you eager to help refugees coming to our community and will you welcome them into the family of Sudbury? Do others appreciate what you offer to assist them? Are you always there for others?

If so, put your hand up and one of our shepherds will provide you with a sheep to remind you of the care and commitment you show each and every day.

VU #9 People, Look East (choir sings verse four as sheep are Presented)

5)

Shepherds in the nativity story share good news of great joy – do you share good news with others, and live a life of joy? Are you a person who perks up the spirit of those around you?

We live in a world where worry and disappointment is everywhere. Yet we know that when someone can offer us hope, and peace, and joy, and love, we experience the spirit of Christ in our midst. Shepherds, though they work hard, also are attuned to the message of hope that Advent brings to us all.

Are you a person who lives that spirit each day, and brings joy to others?

If so, put your hand up and one of our shepherds will provide you with a sheep to remind you of the care and commitment you show each and every day.

VU #9 People, Look East (choir sings verse five as sheep are presented)

6)

There may be some among us who have not identified with any of the gifts that shepherds bring. You may not feel you are in a vocation that demands hard work, or that nurtures the well being of others. You may not be in a position to care for family, neighbours, or friends, and you may not feel that you have been entrusted with hearing, and sharing, good news.

Do not be discouraged. We are all children of God – we are all like sheep looking for a shepherd. Each one of us has gifts to share, and each one of us may face a time when we need the assuring presence of one who, like the shepherds of old, will be attentive to our needs and support us in a caring way.

Do you feel that you are, at times, lost and alone? Have you ever felt abandoned or forgotten? God as shepherd will never forget about you.

If you feel like someone who cannot be a shepherd to others at this time, do not despair. If you put your hand up, one of our young shepherds will provide you with a sheep to remind you of the care and commitment God is willing to show upon you each and every day.

VU #9 People, Look East (choir sings verse one after presentation)

Summary: *We are a people who are like all children of God – in our case, we look to the God revealed to us in Jesus Christ, the shepherd who guides us; we go forward like sheep who know we have a shepherd to protect us; and we are a flock of sheep seeking goodness and wholeness for each new day. Thanks be to God.*