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Luke 15:1-10

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be reflections of your word to us in Christ Jesus.

Um

As long as Jesus has been known as the Good Shepherd, I imagine the followers of Jesus have also been known as a flock. And flocks take on different characteristics and personalities, depending on where they are located, their collective history and of course, the unique way God made them. At the same time, even with all of their uniqueness, their job is to follow the shepherd, while enjoying the gift of his care: with the Shepherd, all needs are met and life has a depth that is ever present and a bit difficult to put into words.

I was curious, so I looked it up . . . what happens when two flocks of sheep are put together? What happens when the Shepherd joins two flocks into one? It's not terribly shocking to hear that they go through an adjustment period. If you give them enough space, the 2 flocks will remain separate, because of course, they hang out with those they know. The males will fight, sometimes to the death; the females have to work out their pecking order, but don't often do physical damage to each other. Those who are different colours will also fight more than those whose appearances are similar. One shepherd observed that the ewes that fight the most are often the ones that end up best friends. She wonders, is this because they are of similar abilities so it takes longer to establish which one is boss, or that they are equal and therefore worthy of each other?¹

In time the flock will establish a new order, where everyone knows their role and where they fit in the whole, and the flock feels like one. When all is well in the world of the flock once again, I imagine one of them lifting its head, looking around and saying, "wait, where did the Shepherd go?"

¹ Online forum for farmers.

That's a little bit how the Visioning Team has felt over the past several months. We know God led us to amalgamation and we were faithful in our yes. And getting to the place of being a new church, a new creation, of you will, was a huge amount of work. As a Visioning Team, we walked into this new phase of our congregational life with a plan, but as we began to execute the plan, we realized the degree to which we didn't fit the plan. We knew there were pieces we were going to skip or do differently, but we realized mid-journey that we needed to do each piece our own way: things like the map on the wall we changed to fit a smaller congregation in a small community. Then there were pieces like history, which was done extensively during the amalgamation. Instead of dragging everyone through the history again, why not go back and look at the written histories that were produced during that time? Reworking each piece of the process made it easy to stay focused on the pieces; it wasn't until we stopped and looked at the big picture, that we were able to see the road. The purpose of this preparatory time was to name the uniqueness of this particular flock, the synthesis of the flock, and to name the givens of our particular context. I'm sure you're wondering what we found . . . in the next couple of weeks I'm going to publish our findings, and give you all a chance to consider it and comment on it.

We are currently . . . and are becoming what God had in mind. God took all of us, myself included, out of our comfort zones and said, how about you set your particular flavour of Christianity aside and live with this other flock. And you all were up to the task, you stuck with it, and have become a new creation. God brought us through a period of disorientation – out of our comfort zones. In fact, this whole parable is about disorientation and reorientation.

Jesus' own question is disorienting: "Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until she finds it?" From a human perspective, the question is absurd, because it doesn't make any logical sense to leave 99 to go after 1. It turns us upside down and confuses us. The parable disorients us to free us from our norms and see another way. So it is with life and community: disorientation takes us out of our norms, gets us away

from the way we've always done things. It makes us think about things in a fresh way, challenges us to reach beyond our normal responses when solving problems. The Shepherd let things get pretty messy, sheep everywhere, vulnerable to danger . . . to do what is in the Shepherd's nature, to not only seek and find, but reorient the sheep to the celebration that is life with God. To set aside human logic to see God's kingdom.

The Visioning Team is considering a couple of guiding scriptures for our journey together, one of which comes from the gospel of John, chapter 15: "I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last." It echoes the way the Shepherd brings the sheep in, saying 'I have called you friend.' I invite you in to share in this gift.

Imagine, if you would, God finding us in the wilderness, a new creation in shared ministry . . . and God carries us as we embark on a new journey toward the celebration-feast God hosts. The celebration God promises our congregation is wrapped up in answering God's call for our congregation. Because living in the flow of God's call is the party . . . and it feels like celebration. It may take effort, but it is the kind that fills us with joy; it may require problem solving, but the process offers a wellspring of life.

Last year when we were participating in small group gatherings in homes, I heard so many stories of congregants who showed up on Gabriola and before they knew it, they made an offer on a piece of property. They stepped off the boat and found themselves at home. God calls people here. Do you believe that? God called you here. God called you to this church to answer a broader call, a collective call to serve our community, and to know as a congregation, the celebration of life God offers. Thanks be to God!