

I saw it advertised on Facebook of all places: The Sheep Dog herding championship in Hudson Wisconsin on Labor Day weekend! So off I went with a few friends to check it out. As I got out of my car, I heard a voice over a microphone whispering kind of like they do at a golf tournament. There was a hushed excitement.

Each border collie and human had to work together to separate out 20 sheep. 10 of the sheep had red collars on their necks, 10 did not. The idea was to get the 10 with red collars separated and placed in to a small pen in a certain amount of time. I watched and quickly learned from the other spectators of this sport. All of this work of herding was done in each team of human and dog with a simple set of whistles and one-word commands. It was masterful to see!

Then, I saw as one sheep started to bolt away from the herd of 20. It was then I heard the human member of the team start to say to her border collie companion, "Lost, lost, lost!"

Lost.

The border collie immediately changed directions and started rapidly chasing the lost sheep back to the fold of the 20. The 20 contentedly stayed together as the human continued to command the dog: lost! Lost! Lost!

The sheep went astray quite a distance, but the dog persisted in her work to bring the sheep back.

The sheep returned to the fold and I laughed out loud pondering today's gospel. This is the very nature of God, the good shepherd who

is so so good that God they will shout and chase us, “lost!” Lost!  
Follow us and bring us back into the fold.

That’s how good God is to all of us!

While the border collie resisted the temptation to nip the sheep, (that’s a disqualification in herding so I’ve been told). I think God doesn’t mind nipping us on occasion. I like to think of the Holy Spirit who provides enlightenment sometimes having to give us a nip to get us back to where we belong.

So who is lost? Who is found?

We have to be careful, beloved, in our own assessment of lost and found especially when thinking about others. Today’s story is about the religious people of Jesus’ time who are clearly lost and have gone far from the fold. They’ve strayed away and are running after judgement. God the creator is calling to the Holy Spirit: Lost! Lost! And the Holy Spirit is in hot pursuit. It is a reminder to us as religious folk that judgement over who comes to church and who doesn’t will surely lead us astray. Lost! Lost! Lost!

The Holy Spirit will no doubt nip at our heels to bring us back. Beloved the anecdote for judgement is curiosity. Stay curious about others—for curiosity keeps us in the fold. Be curious about what is lost in each of us, what is lost in our culture. Where are we lost? Where is the Holy Spirit pursuing us to bring us back?

One of the places that has left us so far a field is isolation and our own rugged individualism. We are lost when we go it alone. Stubbornly running away from other beings which is where we meet God—in each other.

Our western culture is highly influenced by this notion from Rene Des Carte: I think therefore I am. No. That is not the gospel. That is not Jesus. Lost! Lost! Lost!

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is more of an African thinking and philosophy: Ubuntu. Ubuntu literally means, I am because you are. Let me say that again: I am because you are. I am defined by how I relate to you. We are defined by how we relate to our neighbor. All of our neighbors.

Isolation is the enemy of the Gospel, isolation is the enemy of Jesus Christ. Isolation is what sent two jet planes smashing into towers of commerce. Lost! Lost! Lost!

There was no thinking that day. There was no connection. There was only the wretched realization of how deeply lost we were from each other in our world.

Connection to the other changes everything we know. The good shepherd chases us when we are lost. When we stray into judgement of others which is our own private hell, our own private isolation and ego. I can do this better than they do is usually at the heart of judgement. Rather than seeing the connectivity of who we are in the face of who our neighbor is.

We live in a different world since September 11, 2001. A different world—a divided world, a frightened world, and yet, and yet, the Gospel remains the same: sitting down with those different from us and eating changes everything.

Every time I visit with our refugee family the Sadats, there is always tea and something to eat. That is their custom, their way of staying found—eating with each other. It changes everything and reminds us

that I am because you are. We are in the same sheep fold— the same human family. In a meal, Jesus found lost people.

At the heart of our Eucharistic practice beloved is eating. We eat Jesus to become Jesus. We eat to be found from our lost ways of separation and delusion that we can do this earthly pilgrimage alone. Lost! Lost! Lost! We are need of the herd. We need to eat together to remember who we are and to whom we belong. We eat together to be found once again.

The Holy Spirit nips at our heels to bring us back as the Creator, our Momma, our Daddy cries out Lost! Lost! Lost! And Jesus tells us stories in the fold to remind us that we belong, that I am because you are.

The Good Shepherd chases us back into the fold—that's how very good, They, the Good Shepherd is!

Amen.