



ST BART'S

A Sermon by
Casey Lamb, Member of Youth @ the Center

Good Shepherd Sunday/ Mother's Day

Sermon preached at the eleven o'clock service, May 8, 2022

The Fourth Sunday of Easter

Based on Acts 9:36-43; Revelation 7:9-17; John 10:22-30

Good morning, everyone. First, before I start, I'll give a little background about myself. My name is Casey Lamb, and I'm a high school senior at Lab High School in Chelsea. I will be going to college next year, to major in philosophy and economics uptown at Columbia. I've been a member of St. Bart's since I was a baby. I was baptized here and have grown up here.

At some point in our lives, we have all been sheep. At another point, we have all been shepherds. Such is the nature of life. Today is Good Shepherd Sunday; and, as I'm sure many of you know, it is also Mother's Day. These two days go hand in hand. Parents are our shepherds from the moment we are born. They care for us, they guide us, they support us. Mothers are often the backbone of families and the most prominent example of shepherds in our society today. I want to acknowledge my caring and hardworking mother. I'm grateful for everything she does—from helping me submit college applications a day before the deadline, to navigating my stress, to supporting me in everything I do. I want to thank and acknowledge all mothers today.

Throughout our lives we hold the role not only of sheep but also of shepherds. We become parents or teachers; we impart our life experiences and wisdom to the world in hopes of bettering it. We start as children and students. We learn and listen and spend most of our time being sheep. As we grow older, we begin to take on more responsibility to others. We help our peers and coworkers. But as we get older, we often forget that we still must fulfill the role of sheep. We go from accepting all the help offered to us as children, to becoming older and thinking we have everything figured out. But we are not alone in life's challenges and trials. We should utilize the help that others offer to us.

Recently I have been on a reading kick, aiming to catch up on reading some highly influential books before I go off to college next year. Over spring break last month, I read *The Stranger* by Albert Camus. This book really stuck with me. In the shortest possible terms, the book deals with absurdism, nihilism and existentialism, as the main character, Meursault, navigates his way through the world in a calculated, unfeeling manner. He seldom cares for the people or events surrounding him. Midway through the book, Mersault murders someone for no reason, with no motive and no guilt. He is then sent to jail. Throughout the book, many of the people in his life—from friends to acquaintances to even a priest—reach out to him. They all aim to guide him and help him escape his rut of meaninglessness and neglect, not just for others, but also for himself. He rejects all their help, opting instead to live life with no meaning.

The book sent me in a spiral of questions. There was much to examine about the book and its relation to faith (or lack thereof). But what I ultimately was most interested in was this: what made the life of Mersault feel so meaningless, and why did mine differ? I settled on the conclusion that it is the state of

human relationships. Throughout the book, Meursault demonstrates a lack of connection and effort put into his relationships—whether it is with his partner Marie, whom he agrees to marry even after saying he didn't love her minutes before, or the fact that he has no feeling of sadness or grief after his mother's death.

This is no way to live, and fulfilling our calling as shepherds is to make and uphold human connections and relationships. Where we differ from this fictional character is in our human connections. We care for each other; we have feelings and we form emotional bonds. This is what motivates us to live with meaning. We offer each other help, acting as modern shepherds. By tending to our relationships and caring for others, we can be good shepherds. Being a caring friend and person may feel difficult at times. It takes effort and collaboration. But it is a responsible risk that we all must take to live our lives as best as we can.

The other striking part of the novel was that Mersault rejected the help, care and affection offered to him at every turn. I saw this parallel in my life and that of others. Often times we reject help when it is offered to us. I think this most often comes from a place of hubris. Last fall, as I was going through the college application process, I thought at first I could do it all by myself. But as the process continued, I realized that I needed the help of everyone around me. "I can write these essays myself, Mom," I would say, only to end up showing them to her a day or two later, asking her to edit them. I don't think I could have made it through the process without my parents, my teachers and everyone around me offering help and support.

The Lord is our shepherd and will offer us help, but we need to recognize it and accept it. In today's Gospel the crowds say, "If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." Jesus responds, "I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish." My sheep hear my voice. *Listening* is easy. Anyone can listen and zone out. *Hearing* requires active participation. We are called to be sheep—not to just follow blindly, but to *hear* his voice and let ourselves be guided.

Now thus far I've talked a lot about what we should do, but not so much about how we should do it, mostly because this is a personal choice. I think the most obvious ways we can be sheep in our society are to listen to reason and facts when they are presented to us, to accept the help and support of others around us, and to try our best to be a generally good and generous person. As for being a shepherd, these examples may be somewhat cliched, but truly the best thing we can do is help others around us by showing them kindness, dignity and respect. Being an active member of community is acting as a shepherd.

I want to thank and celebrate St. Bart's for the ways it has given a community to me and many others. It has extended guidance and care to many people, with its values of radical welcome and acceptance and through its ministries and programs, such as the youth group. My mom always says, "After a while, New York feels like a small town." In a city of 10 million people, this may seem like an absurd statement. But this sense of community and belonging is established by organizations and communities like St. Bart's. I ask us all to reflect on how we are called to offer care and community to the people around us. Amen.

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