

A Modern-Day Parable: To the Sheep of Lord of Life *Kind Shephard From Afar*

The early morning at the gathering place appeared at first like any other day. However, it was becoming cold with grey clouds filling the morning sky. Only some of the morning's sun filtered through the bare patches in the sky but not giving enough sun to make one believe today was going to be bright and clear. As a shepherd, I began my day by going to the gathering place where I would find my sheep and care, feed, and tend to them. As I have done for many years, it was our pattern. It was our gathering place where my sheep and I would gather.

I knew the way well to the gathering, as did my sheep and lambs. They had been here many times over many years. Today though seemed different. Things were not the same. Normally our routine was a peaceful pattern. We all knew the time to gather and where to meet. We all knew to come to the gathering place.

Today something was off. The air was filled with slight tension. The quietness seemed different. The busy dirt roads shown little evidence of the sheep and their lambs coming to our gathering place. Rather, the road seemed hollow and empty, as if not traveled at all.

I had gotten there early and waited at my spot for my sheep. No one came. There were no sheep nor lambs at our gathering place. The road and field to our gathering place was empty. There was no trace of their coming.

It was odd for most sheep were never late. The routine of a few made their arrival later than others. But I always patiently welcomed them thinking to myself "better late than not at all." As I walked around our gathering place it seemed too quiet and the icy cold reminded me this was a different morning. Fear poked its head inside my heart saying: "What if they do not come?" "What if they have lost their way in the darkness of the night?" "How will I bring them to our gathering place like we have always done?" "What then?"

Getting to the gathering place can be hard and is easy to lose ones way. Many travel here when it is dark, and the way is not easy. The sounds of night often bring fear to those who travel and makes the gathering place seem too far. Doubt and fear creep into the crakes of sheep's minds and hearts for who travel in the darkness of night. But the drawing of the Spirit to come to the gathering place brings strength in each step forward of the sheep...closer to the love and freedom to be found there.

I went into the gathering place hoping, just hoping, to find them all where I would normally see them. But it was empty inside. This was not the gathering place I knew. They were not at our gathering place as I had hoped. But why?

I stepped outside of our gathering place wondering, hoping, and praying that they would come soon, as they had so many times before. I sat on a bench near the door and gazed into the morning sky wondering if they were all well. Are they protected? Are they sick or injured? Are they safe? Where are my sheep?

The morning breeze and chirping birds gave no indication this morning was different than any other day. In many ways the morning seemed normal but yet it was obviously going to be a very different day.

We have met here countless times before. My sheep knew well they would be cared for, fed, and nursed back to health at the gathering place. This is why they came. Gazing into the morning sky, I noticed a bit of the warmth of the Son touching and warming my face as if the Son was so very close. I let my mind wander. I saw the many faces of my sheep; the young, old, strong, and the weak. All their faces jumped into my mind as I recalled the previous times, we had been together at the gathering place.

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I smiled thinking of the very young lambs always so playful, so full of life. They would come dancing and running for all to watch and enjoy. These little ones cared little about what others thought of their dancing and playing and enjoyed being at the gathering place with others.

The older sheep would warmly look at these young lambs and say to themselves, "I too used to dance and play." They knew the freedom that came from this gathering place for their parents had taught them. They too grew up know the gathering place was a place to be loved and a place where they could be free. Their parents brought them to the gathering place knowing one day they would need to know the way for themselves. As the little lambs, squirmed and smiled and played at the gathering place, the hearts of older sheep would fill with joy and love offering a prayer "Please do not lose your way to this gathering place, little one."

I pictured in my mind the older ones. I cared so much for them as they were special. Their scars and struggles were evidence of the battles they encountered in life. At times, they seemed so weak and frail. The many scars that marked their legs and backs reminded those around them they had journeyed long and hard for many days to be at this gathering place where they too would sing, dance and be free. Though their eyes grew dimmer every day and hearing poor, they knew to come to this gathering place.

I searched the areas where I often found my sheep, for I knew them well. I knew where they would lay, sit, eat, drink, run, and sleep. I knew my sheep in a way as a mother knows her nursing child, close and lovingly holding them near to my heart. I knew they felt comfort and safety at our gathering place, but the sheep were not there. It was not the same. My heart was heavy with concern for my sheep.

Dreaming and hoping to see and find my sheep, I gazed into the land stretched in front of me. Straining my eyes to the horizon, it looked if someone was coming toward our gathering place. As he approached, I wondered who he was.

And so I greeted him, "Kind sir, from where did you come? I have not seen you here before at this gathering place."

He simply said, "May I sit and rest awhile with you for I have travel from afar to find that which is lost."

"But of course," I replied, "please sit and rest." I wondered about his words and why he would travel so far to find that which was lost?

He gently asked me, "For what do you wait and seek? What are you looking for at this gathering place?"

I said, "Kind sir, my sheep have lost their way and they are not at our gathering place today. I meet my sheep here to feed and take care of them, for I am the shepherd. They know the way here but did not come here today to sing and dance and be free."

The kind Shepherd said, "A shepherd, you say? I too am a Shepherd. I know it is hard to keep and care for those who are ours. I too seek to find my sheep in the darkness. I too worry for them. I know they will be frightened because darkness brings fear. But I will walk in the dark of night calling their names to bring them to the light. They will hear me calling, "Have no fear." I carry a light to see in the darkness of night. Where I am, their darkness becomes day light."

I ask, "Kind Shepherd, can you help me find my sheep for I know not where they are or if they have lost their way?"

The kind Shepherd looked into my eyes and said, "I will find your sheep for they have not gone far."

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Still filled with concern, I asked “But it is near dark and in darkness there is fear and death. How can you see in the dark of night?”

The kind Shepherd held my hand and simply said, “I have come to walk in darkness and gather my sheep.” Worn from a day of worry and fear, I suggested we wait to go tomorrow morning to look for my sheep.

The kind Shepherd, said firmly, “No. I must go now. Darkness is daylight wherever I am. This is the reason for which I have come. I desire for not one sheep to be lost and they may know the way to the gathering place and the gifts found there.”

I cried, “Oh kind Shepherd, please would you go for me into the darkness of night and find my sheep? I will tell you their names. I know them well.

The kind Shepherd said, “I do not need their names. I too know them.”

Confused, I asked, “But how can you know them? You have not been to this gathering place before.”

“My son,” he said, “I do come to this gathering place and I am never very far.”

Confused by such a thought, I said, “Go now for it is dark and the sheep are lost and need to be found. Tell them when they come back to our gathering place, I will meet them here. This will be the place where once again we will sing, dance and be filled with joy together. Please tell them that for me.”

As the kind Shepherd, walked into cold, damp darkness , “I will” he said, “I will.” As I watched him leave, I hoped to see him soon with the sheep and lambs together once again at the gathering place.

I waited through the cold, dark night for the Kind Shepherd and my sheep. The night was long, but I kept remembering the Kind Shepherd’s words....”With me, darkness is light.”

It was in the early morning when I heard a sound in the distance. It was my sheep dancing and singing for they had been found in the darkness and brought back into the light and to the gathering place. I greeted them with great joy for that which was lost was found by the Kind Shepherd. My sheep and lambs were back at our gathering place again, where we would sing, dance and be free. The thanksgiving and joy we shared made the long night of waiting hard to remember.

I wanted to thank the Kind Shepherd who came from afar to help me find my sheep and bring them back to me. I asked , “Where is the kind Shepherd that found you and brought you back to our gathering place?” They said, “He told us to tell you to wait here at this gathering place, to sing, dance, filled with joy and thanksgiving and be free. And to remember, while we may not see him with our eyes, he is here.”

Now, many years later, that day stays clear in my memory. I often think about this kind Shepherd who came from afar. Does he tire? Is he frightened walking in the darkness of night? But then I remembered what he told me, “Darkness is daylight wherever I go, for I am the Kind Shepherd from afar, thou you do not see me with your eyes...I am always near at this gather place just taste, hear and see.”

**So we will sing, dance and play for we are free, and here meet our
Kind Shephard from Afar at this - our greeting place!**

Pastor Below, Under-shepherd of the Kind Shepherd from Afar.