

This Gospel of the Good Shepherd has great meaning for me. As you know I spent an academic year at and graduated from Mother Barbara's alma mater General Theological Seminary. I had earned my first Master's degree from Lancaster Theological Seminary, a United Church of Christ seminary which is, also, the Bishop's alma mater, (I have followed the footsteps of two great people on my journey); and because Lancaster is UCC I had to do what is called an Anglican year at an Episcopal seminary. I chose General for what I thought were good reasons, my daughters and grandchildren living in New York City may have had a little to do with it, but General was the original seat of the Anglo-Catholic branch of the Church, and I felt I needed to inculcate that part of the Church into my Episcopalian DNA. General is not so Anglo-Catholic anymore, but enough that I found what I was seeking. Or, at least, what I thought I was seeking.

General is a bucolic place. It is an oasis in the midst of Chelsea, a bustling vibrant section of Manhattan, filled with shops and restaurants and clubs. The campus of General is called the Close. It is a beautiful landscaped quiet setting through which seminarians, faculty and staff move about in serene peace. In the midst of the Close is the Chapel of the Good Shepherd, a beautiful monastic place of Anglican worship in which we worshipped every day except Sunday, which is the day seminarians served at other parishes and which Faculty could worship at the myriad of other churches in New York. In the Chapel behind the altar is a large Eurocentric statue of Jesus with lambs depicting the Good Shepherd of our Gospel today. There is a soft spotlight always shining on the statue that highlights it so that when you walk past the chapel's open iron doors at night, you can see the Good Shepherd.

I lived in Dodge Hall, in the shadow of the Chapel. I could literally roll out of bed, and did literally roll out of bed for Morning Prayer at 8 am. If I wasn't serving as a Sacristan, my Morning Prayer dress of choice was usually the

closest clothes near my bed. And I was often a modern-day Sister Bertrille flying down the walkway just beating in the last toll of the bell announcing prayers. If you are ever in New York and find yourself in Chelsea in the morning I urge you to take the time to say Morning Prayer with the seminary in the Chapel. Or, have lunch in the Close, especially if you visit New York during the gentle climes of the year. Stop at my favorite coffee shop Bergamot at 20th and 9th Ave, grab a sandwich or a couple of luscious French pastries, and head around the corner to enter General through the tall wrought iron gates and sit in the Close outside the Chapel of the Good Shepherd; then, step inside for a prayer before you leave. it is a wonderful place to spend an hour.

As I was packing my bags to move into General, i was getting all my affairs in order including routine health checks. When I went for my annual mammogram, they called me back which for me is not unusual. But, they wanted to do a biopsy that afternoon on a growth they found. Uh, oh. This can't be good, I thought. But I was headed for my last year of seminary, so it couldn't be ... So I drove the Uhaul truck to New York with most of my earthly belongings to move in according to plan, and begin my last year of study. As my son-in-law Patrick and I had just sat down in a great pub around the corner to recover with a couple mugs from moving me into my room in Dodge Hall, I received the call that confirmed I had breast cancer. Good news, we are going to set up treatment for you at the best cancer hospital in the world ... I literally felt I had stepped into the twilight zone. But, when Patrick walked me back to the gate of the seminary and back into the Close, I began living into Jesus' words in today's Gospel 'I am the gate. If anyone enters by me, she will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.'

I had my first surgery the week after classes began, and a second surgery a month later. I went to class in between. The Seminary and my children and

grandchildren became my sheepfold. Living in the shadow of the Chapel of the Good Shepherd was a daily reminder of the role of Jesus as the Good Shepherd in my life. Worshiping everyday in that beautiful space reinforced my understanding that every time I went to the hospital for treatment, I could return from the pasture to the sheepfold that was the Close. My relationship as a mother shifted from doting mother to temporary, semi-dependent Mom. I thought I had come to General in New York City just to study and learn Anglican worship and dote over my daughters ... My children took care of me during this time in ways that only shepherds do. My daughter Melissa and Patrick had their third child, my fourth grandchild Abigail, the day of my first surgery. The hospital Abbie was born in was up the street from where I had surgery so that my youngest daughter Azizi who accompanied me to the hospital could go see her new niece while I was in recovery. When hurricane Sandy hit New York in November, Melissa and Patrick's apartment complex had the only electricity and hot water in the area. They were my sheepfold. I recognized the voice of the Good Shepherd guiding us and leading us and watching over us as we went in and out the gate.

Living in this relationship with Jesus the Good Shepherd during this awfully scary time allowed me to dare to think that he was going to protect from the bandit cancer that was trying to steal my body and my soul. I could have easily gone into the 'Dark Night of the Soul', and remorseful over whether the training and studying for the priesthood at this time of my life was all for naught. And, then I would sometimes be on my knees in prayer in the Chapel, and remember who brought me there in the first place. That I had not come this far totally on my own power, but by the power of the Good Shepherd who was carrying me now like the lamb that was on his shoulder. My shifting relationship with my daughters, allowing them to take care of me

and not me fussing over them, was listening to voice of the Good Shepherd telling me to trust that he was guiding me to where I was supposed to be in a new relationship with my children.

Trusting that Jesus is the Good Shepherd is the key to strengthening our faith in him because we will believe that our lives can change from terrible to wonderful because that is what God wants for us, life in abundance. When God sent the Son to show us through his death that we were not in this fight alone against the bandits and thieves of this world like cancer, depression, oppression, poverty, abuse, all the things that exist in this world that will destroy our bodies and souls, when we realize that we are not in this fight alone, but that THE Savior came to open the gate for us to come back into the sheepfold from the evils this world, when we realize this, then we begin to learn to trust in our faith in The Lord. This is when we lower the fear and anxiety meters and allow the Good Shepherd to guide us, to watch over us as we go through the worse things this life can throw at us. When we realize that through our faith, the gate is always open, and will close behind us to keep the thieves and the bandits off of us, we are building trust that regardless of how things come out, it's going to be okay because we are under the protection of the Good Shepherd. I love New York City. It was one of my favorite cities before my girls lived there, but I didn't wander often from Seminary to explore the city during my nine months there other than to visit my daughters or go to church because I needed to stay close to the voice of the Good Shepherd, to hear him remind me that I could always go through the gate into the Close and the care of my daughters, the gates of my sheepfold, that there was a safe haven for me from the treatment in my studying, in worshiping in the Chapel and being on the Close.

Sometimes we need to do that, cling to the sheepfold and understand that Jesus laid down his life in front of the entrance, that he is the entrance, and

that trusting in him is the only care we need not just to get us through but to lift us up, and lets us see what the world looks like from his shoulder. I believe this is the trust that is expressed in the 23rd Psalm that 'although we walk through the valley of darkness, we fear no evil because God is with us'. I believe that our faith and trust enables us to locate and identify the sheepfolds that God creates for us. They are there with Jesus as the gate guiding us in and out. May we ever know and trust that the Good Shepherd is ever watchful of us, providing a safe haven of his love for all of us. He is the gate, that we can always enter trusting and believing in his care.