

The Lord is my goatherd

Isaiah 53:1-6

April 17, 2005

*The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not want.
He lets me rest in fields of green grass
and leads me to quiet pools of fresh water.
He gives me new strength.*

What comforting, encouraging words! God will provide all my needs! God will give me new strength! What comforting, encouraging words ... As long as you're a sheep! But what if you're a goat? Think about it! What if you're a goat? You sure aren't going to see any green pastures or be led to any quiet pools of fresh water, are you?

Because goats get no respect. Goats don't catch any breaks.

- You hit a home run in the bottom of the ninth to win the game for the home team and you're acclaimed as ... the hero! But you let a ground ball run through your legs, your team loses the game and the World Series, and you're called ... the goat!

- So many animals can take pride in having sports teams named after them. Teams are named after wild animals: lions and tigers and bears and bucks. Teams are named after domestic animals: bulls and rams and broncos. Teams are named after marine animals and birds: marlins, dolphins, sharks, eagles, cardinals, orioles. There is even a team named after a rattlesnake: the Arizona Diamondbacks. But you did you ever hear of the Los Angeles Goats? You never will!

- What do you call a cranky and crusty old man? An old goat!

- Did you ever hear the fable of the fox and the goat? It seems a fox accidentally falls into well and cannot get out. When a thirsty goat comes by, the fox tricks him into jumping down into the well to get a drink. The fox then explains their predicament and persuades the goat to let the fox climb onto his back to get out and get help for the both of them. Which, of course, the now-escaped fox has no intention of doing! The moral? Look before you leap ... Don't be like the goat ... gullible and not-so-smart!

- Even Jesus doesn't give goats much respect. He tells a parable about the final judgment, about separating the peoples of the world into two groups ... sheep to the right, goats to the left ... the righteous to his right and everybody else to his left!

It's tough to be a goat! When you're a goat, nobody thinks you're beautiful, except maybe your mother! You're kind of homely, boney and hard, rough around the edges, scruffy -- even female goats have beards. You have a reputation for not being very discriminating. In other words, you'll eat anything! You're more sassy than sweet, more rough than gentle, more stubborn than obedient. Some would even say you had a mean streak. You're kind of an outsider, certainly useful, but not worthy of any special attention or regard. On the list of favored species, you're somewhere down there toward the bottom.

It's tough to be a goat ...

I should know ... because I am one! I'm kind of homely, rough around the edges; there is nothing particularly attractive or glamorous about me. I do not always have very discriminating tastes. Sometimes I choose well, but other times I'll get into something that isn't really so good for me. There are many things out there that you can put into your mind or heart that are like spiritual junk food at best and many things that are positively dangerous for your soul!

I can be sassy, grumpy, cranky, stubborn, and I'm not sure that I am worthy of any special attention or regard. I know my place in the world. I know where I belong and where I don't belong.

I know what it feels like to be a goat ... and maybe some of you do, too. So what hope do we have? Does God care about goats, too?

Listen again to the scripture from Isaiah:

All we like goats have gone astray ...

Yes! That is what it says! The Hebrew word -- *tson* means small cattle, small livestock, in others words, sheep ... or goats!

All we like goats have gone astray, each of us going his own way ... but the Lord made the punishment fall on him, the punishment all of us deserved.

On him? Yes, on the one called the Lord's servant, on the suffering servant, on the servant who suffers scorn and humiliation and abuse, on the one who is despised and rejected. On Jesus.

Jesus is despised and rejected:

He had no [special] dignity or beauty to make us take notice of him ...

There was nothing attractive about him, nothing that would draw us to him ...

In other words, Jesus is a goat, too!

Jesus is the chief goat. Jesus is the scapegoat. That word, *scapegoat*, takes its meaning from the rituals prescribed in Leviticus for the celebration of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. The high priest laid his hands on the head of a chosen goat and confessed all the sins of the people, symbolically, ritually, spiritually transferring the sins of the people to that goat. The goat was then sent away, out into the wilderness, bearing away all the sins of the people.

Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!

That's what John the Baptist said about Jesus. But couldn't he have said just as well:

Behold the goat of God who takes away the sins of the world?

Jesus comes to us, as one of us, showing concern for all of us, sheep and goats alike. And just as the gift of a goat literally brought hope and new life to the young Ugandan girl, Beatrice, so God's gift of this goat -- Jesus -- literally brings us hope and new life.

You sometimes feel like a goat? It's OK. Even if you are a goat, God's promises are for you, too!

*The Lord is my goat-herd;
I shall not want.
He lets me rest in fields of green grass
and leads me to quiet pools of fresh water.
He gives me new strength ...*

God loves goats, too. God doesn't see them as homely and scruffy and not very valuable. God sees them as they are ... as beautiful and valuable and full of energy ... as precious beyond imagination. The Lord is my goatherd!