

EDS Sunday sermon, November 20, 2011

May God bless you, and may you know his will in your lives, Amen.

So, here's my dilemma. Do I attempt to dissect Matthew's gospel about sheep and goats and eternal life vs. eternal punishment? Do I attempt to analyze Ezekiel's metaphor of the lean sheep who are now surrounding me up here and the one fat sheep standing before you? How about Paul's letter to the Ephesians?

Let me digress on this Episcopal Day School Sunday at Emmanuel. Some of my best thinking and meditation occurs in the carpool line at 7:45 A.M. every weekday at EDS. At school, we recognize the different learning styles in our students: Auditory, Visual, and Kinesthetic or Tactile. In the carpool line, auditorially, there is lots of easy banter with children and parents and the occasional revelation from a child about an event that may or may not have occurred at home the night before. Don't worry parents, I tell faculty to believe half of what they hear about home doings and that parents should believe half of what they hear about us from their children. Visually, from our students I'm treated daily to great backpack, skirt, shorts and jeans, sneakers and socks combos, with

the occasional dazzling umbrella and snazzy sunglasses. And in the tactile area, I sometimes am afforded the opportunity to handle the remnants of a nice gooey breakfast treat or something else as I grab a hand to help a child out of the car. Not to worry, my office is Purell central.

Back to the banter. This past Monday as Senior Warden, Stuart Mills, was dropping off Charlotte and Vickie I told him about my sermon dilemma. Stuart smiled that wise and knowing Stuart smile and said, “Jay, it’s your last one of these so say whatever you want.” So thank you Stuart.

Have you heard the one about the shepherd who walks into a School?

At Episcopal Day School we are surrounded by shepherds and all of you have had wise shepherds who have helped, guided, directed, and assisted you throughout your lives. Psalm 23 has it right in that The Lord is my Shepherd so it starts with God. For me and maybe for you, God speaks to me through people, young and old, so I have many shepherds current and past. Mrs. Hennessy, Mrs. Martin, Mrs. Marable, Miss Heath, Mrs. Eggert, and Mr. Merante were my elementary school

teachers. Miss Heath had the best nickname. It was the 1950's, and she was "The H Bomb". Quite a temper. We did catch my sixth grade teacher, Mr. Merante, kissing Miss Laventis a fifth grade teacher. They later married, more importantly, he could throw a football 60 yards on a rope easily and took eight students to Washington DC over spring break. SHHHH, fire crackers were purchased in Virginia.

Amy and Father John are shepherds guiding chapel and sacred studies three times a week. Our teachers on a daily basis are shepherds. My how they deeply and professionally care for their students through encouragement, positive reinforcement, and golden awards. Outside my office hangs a student's portrait of Rocky Bonsal with the inscription, Our Shepherd. Rocky was a remarkable man and Board of Trustees chairman here at EDS building morale, helping create the scholarship endowment and rainy day fund which keeps EDS debt free. No private school in the area can say that. Parents are shepherds working together with their children and teachers to make sure that their children are growing, thriving, while living our mission. The PTA through all the events they put on to serve our students and faculty as well as the community are great shepherds.

Sunday, December 4th will be the 34th Annual Candlelight Tour of Homes. Five beautiful homes will be open and decorated for Christmas. Funds raised by this PTA event will go to student and faculty programs and is open to the entire community. I do hope you'll come. Students: most definitely shepherds. What I have learned from students over the years and how they have shaped my life is one of the joys of this profession. While reflecting on 40 years in independent education, I realize that my closest friends are former colleagues and former students with whom I've worked in addition to one best friend I've known since the age of five when we were in Mrs. Hennessy's kindergarten class together. In many cases the students while they were students and as they have grown into adulthood have become my teachers. It's kind of a Mr. Myagi moment where the student becomes the teacher. What shepherd hasn't learned from his or her flock?

The best headmaster and shepherd I ever worked for was Desmond Cole at The Allen Stevenson School in New York City in the mid 1980's when I was head of the middle school there. Desmond was British, distinguished, eccentric, wore tweedy three piece suits, looked like a Dickens character or Roald Dahl headmaster, and had run in seven NYC marathons. He was in his late 60's. He

created an after school and weekend club which the faculty loathed. It was called the Rascals' Club. Only students who had gotten in trouble at school could be members. The faculty including me, my first year, said Desmond you are rewarding bad behavior. Kids misbehave and you're celebrating them with weekend camping trips and fun afterschool activities. Desmond said, every child has worth and needs to be encouraged to do the right thing. If they do not believe they are loved they will flounder. I came around my second year to the virtues of Desmond's club. He retired to Durham in 1989 when Beth and I got married, and he passed away three years ago. His memorial ceremony was at the Duke Gardens where he worked as a docent with his wife. He went to Duke to take courses, too, as a true lifelong learner. A great life well lived. After the funeral I spoke to his successor at Allen Stevenson who eulogized Desmond. I told him the Rascals' club story and he smiled then laughed and he said do you know the Rascals' Club members are the largest donors to the school! The shepherd, Desmond, did the right thing and his sheep, the students, responded. Desmond would not have cared about the big donations only that the students/ rascals

were known and loved at his school just as all the students at EDS are known and loved here.

I'm convinced that Jesus believed in this kind of shepherding and that every child is a child of God. Episcopal Day School believes this, too. The board of trustees and their strategic plan, the faculty, students, parents, and friends of EDS over 53 years are all shepherds of this unique place which is a beacon of light here in Southern Pines and a foundation for character development and academic achievement for life. We take students where they are and help them grow in character and academic achievement in a truly Christian environment. Episcopal Day School is a jewel of a school with openings in kindergarten, first, and second grades. Hey, shepherds can make a pitch, too!

May the Lord be your shepherd, may God bless you, and may you know his will in your lives. Have a Happy Thanksgiving. Amen.

Jay St. John
Headmaster