

**Trinity Church Wall Street 11:15am Holy Eucharist – Trinity Sunday
The Rt. Rev. Mark D.W. Edington Transcript**

"Disciples and Divides"

"We are no longer just the sheep in this story. We are the body of Christ, alive and at work in the world, doing the work of transforming this broken world outside those doors with love, because we are taught that it is the only force on earth that has the power to change anything –even despair, even grief– for good."

Preaching at Trinity Church on Good Shepherd Sunday, the Rt. Rev. Mark D.W. Edington, Bishop in Charge of the Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe, tackled one of our faith's most pressing questions: how do we act as shepherds in a divided world that "seems to treat us as if we are offering answers to questions that nobody is asking anymore?"

With humor, humility, and inspiring conviction he offers that as contemporary disciples, we can guide the lost or lonely by being "the one thing in their universe that does not move; that stays here, calmly and quietly, insisting on the truth we have been taught: that God loves us and loves them and calls us all together into greater life." The readings are Acts 9:36–43; Psalm 23; Revelation 7:9–17; and John 10:22–30.

Sermon Transcript:

Lord to be masters of ourselves, that we might be the servants of others. Take our minds and think through them, take our hands and work through them, take our lips and speak through them, take our hearts and set them on fire for Christ's sake, amen.

Good morning, everybody. Good morning. I have the privilege of bringing you greetings from your sisters and brothers of the Episcopal Church in Europe. We have a long and historic connection to this city and the churches in this diocese. Indeed, many of the founding members of our parishes in the 19th century were people who came from here and divided their time between here and Europe. And so we feel somehow connected to you, even if you, come on, admit it, didn't even know we were there. This sermon has a title. The title is disciples and divides. And I want to invite you to just think about these a few words from the text you just heard. My sheep, hear my voice. For those of us who grew up in this tradition, it does not take much time to recognize today as Good Shepherd Sunday. The collects, the lessons, the familiar words of the 23rd Psalm, the hymns, it hits you over the head this morning that today is about metaphor, and the metaphor is more ovine than divine. Now I am new here and pretty much all of you are unknown to me, but I would guess just from looking at you that not many of you have spent much time in the company of sheep. And I don't know what advertising you got for the preacher today, it might have talked about Europe or Paris or our cathedral there, but the fact is that when I'm home, I am on a farm in Massachusetts, a place where when I first saw it, sheep were on the

land. So maybe you have been taken in by the hallmark card notions of shepherds and sheep and the gentle pastoral images and the pictures of fluffy lambs, and the flock of meek little animals following around a shepherd who leads them into verdant pastures. Anyone who has spent much time in the company of sheep will quickly tell you that is nonsense. Sheep are not meek and mild and willing followers and dorsal disciples, sheep are dumb. Not just that, sheep are dumb and stubborn, they have tiny minds. And their tiny minds get made up in the worst ways about the wrong things. And dear friends, in this story, we are the sheep. Anyone who might've been in the audience hearing Jesus say these words instead of hearing them read for them out of John's gospel on a Sunday morning in Wall Street, they would have known all of that.

So the people around Jesus heard this idea about sheep and shepherds in a very different way than we do. And that is what I want to ask you to think about with me this morning. It is always this Sunday, this fourth Sunday of Easter that we get this theme, Good Shepherd Sunday always comes on this liturgical day. But we do not always hear the same lessons on this day. Last year, we heard the nice version, the first part of this tenth chapter of the Gospel of John where Jesus says of himself, I am the good shepherd. And he goes on to say, the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. Now that we can relate to, it's about what is in it for us, sheep. It's about the cost of being a shepherd on our behalf. If we have to be cast as the sheep in this metaphor, well then we want a shepherd who will protect us. But this year we hear the other end of this same chapter. And this year it is not about the cost to the shepherd, this year it's about the cost for the sheep. If you have ever tried to gather a group of sheep together in a field by means of your voice to get them moving in one direction toward a common purpose, you know some of them will hear you and some of them will not. Some of them will pick up their heads and look at you and some of them will just keep on grazing. It's the same grass for all of them under the same sky. It's the same sunshine and the same flock and the same wolves and the same voice. Some of them hear and some of them don't. What we learn in this year's version of the Good Shepherd story is that what it means to be in that flock, what it means to be one of those sheep is to pay the cost of making a choice. Some of them, maybe they're not convinced by that voice, maybe they have questions, but they hear enough to want to hear more. They want to follow along wherever that shepherd leads to see more, learn more, ask more. And some would rather just graze. My first job in ordained ministry was in a university church. Undergraduates are a lot like sheep. I met students who could not have cared less about religion or faith and I met students who had been brought up in a faith tradition and were eager to be in a conversation with people in their own tradition and others.

And I met people at just about every point on the spectrum in-between, but far and away, the hardest experience I walked alongside in those days was that of young people who for whatever reason in those college years had suddenly heard that voice, suddenly heard a voice that called them into conversation with what they experienced as the presence of God in their lives, the possibility of making meaning on the basis of belief. And when they looked around at the rest of their flock, what they noticed was a lot of them were still grazing and not really paying attention. And they wondered whether they were crazy or wrong. It felt lonely and discouraging. And the job of the community of faith in that moment, our job is not to do the one thing we usually do, which is to get them to sign up for a committee or give them more coffee, it was to listen to what they were experiencing. Now we, sisters and brothers, we are the church. We're no longer just a sheep in this story, we are the body of Christ alive and at work in the world and doing the work of transforming this broken world outside those doors with love, because we are taught that it is the only force on Earth that has the power to change anything, even despair, even grief for good. So that means in this story, we have crossed the margin from being the sheep into being the shepherd. And when you are the shepherd, when you raise your voice to that flock and still see heads down on the ground focused on the grass, you don't think. Well, some of them get it and some of

them don't. Some of them are right and some of them are wrong. What you think is ask for their field, what you think is what am I doing wrong? Why can't they hear me? It is not just that we want them to agree with us, it is that we have come to know in our bones something that is not just true, but desperately true, urgently true, and that we feel compelled to find some way to share that truth to make sure it gets heard in this world. And that truth is this. We have been put on this earth to help each other and to heal each other, to respect each other, and honor one another. And we are making the wrong choices in going about all of that. We are not making choices that align with God's hope for us, we are grand culture. We're not making choices that listen to that voice still speaking among us.

My friends, I venture onto dangerous ground when I speak a truth that you all know, but because of that, I will not politely avoid it. This past week has brought into harsh focus a fundamental question of life choices. Not just over who chooses, but what is at stake in the choice to have a child. But here is a truth that stands high, and apart from our divided society. If every child that came into the world came as the product of a longed for, hoped for, prayed for choice, sisters, and brothers, we would not be having this argument. If we talked with our children about how sacred they are to us, about how the experience of parenthood has transformed our own lives is by the power of love. Given this gift of free will because we are made in the image, and likeness of God, if we made sure that every child was treasured as a free choice of will, we would not be having this argument. The shepherds among us who know this most deeply are not the people standing out in the meadow with the funny stick nor the shepherds among us who know this most of all are mothers, and they know better than anyone that some of us listen, and some of us don't. Now, of course, to do all of that, to teach this to our children, we would have to be listening to, and following that voice that says our lives are meant to have meaning. That all lives are equally sacred, equally worthy. And there is a whole culture around us with the power of money, and of influencers desperate to knock that idea down. Because if it were true, all of its claims would collapse in a heap. We who gather here on a Sunday morning weather in New York or Paris or Rome or Geneva or Tbilisi. We started out as sheep, and now we are the shepherds. We are the voices out there trying to call, trying to nurture, and feed, trying to warn as the whole world around us seems to be shaky at the foundations. And if we are honest with ourselves, we often feel unequal to the task that God has set before us.

We are no longer an institution that influencers care about. Our failures, and they have been real failures, our failures seem to have gotten us deplatformed in the culture around us. We sense deeply these trues we want to share, and the world that we are in seems to treat us as though we are offering answers to questions nobody is asking anymore. What do we do? How can we be disciples, shepherds in that divided world? Well, I started at the farm, and I will end at the farm. When we first came to that place now more than 30 years ago, it was owned by my friend Paul. He is a writer. He kept sheep, and he kept friends. And one beautiful summer Saturday we found ourselves at the table for lunch with another couple who had come out from the city just like us. Paul's friends tended to be writers too, and I was working in publishing those days. So our conversation was not really very much attached to the ground, and in the middle of it all the telephone rang. It was a neighbor calling from about a half a mile down the road. Paul, one of your sheep has gotten out, and it's here. This luncheon had been well supplied with wine. So, of course, the six of us, highly educated young professionals decided that the best thing to do was to pile in the minivan, and go down the road to get that sheep. That is what we did. And when we got there, sure enough, there was the sheep calmly grazing on what must have been greener grass in the neighbor's yard under the watchful eye of the 12-year-old son. Now, I'm going to spare myself, and my old friends a lot of embarrassment by skipping over what happened next. But basically, the six of us ended up lunging at this animal with utterly no chance of catching it whatsoever.

And at the end of about 20 minutes, we were all flat, and grass-stained on the ground panting, and the sheep was still grazing.

Of course, that was the moment at which that 12-year-old boy helpfully piped up, and said, "Would you guys like any help?" We were all too worn out to put up much resistance, and so we said yes, and got to our feet. And instead of moving toward that sheep, the boy just stood where he was, and said, "Make a circle around her." We did. We arranged ourselves in a circle. And then he said, "Take two steps toward me." So we did, "Do it again." We did. This time that sheep looked up. It noticed that something was changing, thought about it for a minute, and then went back to grazing. Then he said, "Okay. Very slowly, just keep walking toward me." He never moved. Pretty soon that sheep looked up. We were moving closer. The spaces between us were getting smaller. It looked from one of us to another, and then what do you suppose it did? It ran right for the one thing that wasn't moving. That boy. Right into his arms. He fell down, and laughed. Maybe shepherds, maybe. And this divided world of ours, we can give up trying to compete with all the loud voices out there that are calling, confusing this poor sheep. Maybe, friends, our job right now in this world is to be the one thing in their universe that does not move. That stays here calmly, and quietly, insisting on the truth we have been taught here. That God loves us, and loves them, and calls us all together into greater life. And who knows? Maybe some of those sheep will make straight for us.

Amen.