

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Aug 13th 2013

In today's Gospel the disciples, who we find out in other places have been squabbling amongst themselves over who is best, ask Jesus who is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. And in a surprise move, to the disciples, he brings out a child. A child, to their thinking, surely could not be the greatest. Children then had no place at all. They had no rights, they were subject to their parents and practically everyone else. A child would seem to be the opposite of greatest. But Jesus says that children are humble, perhaps as opposed to the disciples who very recently were jockeying for power. Children are innocent and trusting. And he insists that the disciples welcome children and other humble powerless people in Jesus' name. They are specifically warned against turning away anyone who would seem unimportant.

But a shepherd with a big herd who found one of his sheep missing would search for that one sheep, even though he had 99 more, and rejoice at finding that lost sheep. A sheep, childlike, is lowly, and is also trusting. It's the shepherd's job to keep track of the sheep and keep them safe. Even if the shepherd might not feel the loss of one sheep out of a hundred, what would happen to the sheep that went astray? It would be in danger, out of the protection of its community. The shepherd has a responsibility to protect all the flock. The shepherd who finds and regains the lost sheep not only feels joy at regaining his property that might be lost but also relief in knowing that the sheep is now safe with the others.

God rejoices in the return of one of his own who was thought to be lost but is returned. But it's not only because God wants a bigger following, but because he realizes that we, like sheep, out of our community are lost and in danger. Returned to the fold we can be safe in his protection in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Tami Whitney