

Easter 4C Sermon 042510
Acts 9:36-43; Psalm 23
Revelation 7:9-17; John 10:22-30

In the name of Jesus – the Good Shepherd, Amen.

A wealthy man decided to go on a safari in Africa. He took his faithful pet dachshund along for company. One day, the dog started chasing butterflies and before long discovered that he was lost.

As he wandered he suddenly noticed a leopard heading rapidly in his direction with the obvious intention of having him for lunch. The dachshund thought, “OK, I’m in deep trouble now!” Then he noticed some bones on the ground close by, and immediately settled down to chew on the bones with his back to the approaching cat. Just as the leopard was about to pounce, the dachshund exclaimed loudly, “Boy, that was one delicious leopard. I wonder if there are any more around here.” Hearing this, the leopard stopped in mid-stride. With a look of terror he slunk away into the trees. “Whew,” sighed the leopard. “That was close. That dachshund nearly had me.” Meanwhile, a monkey, who had been watching the whole scene from a nearby tree, figured he could put this knowledge to good use and trade it for protection from the leopard. So, off he went to tell the leopard everything.

The dachshund saw the monkey heading toward the leopard and figured that something must be up. The monkey soon spilled the beans and struck a deal for himself with the leopard. The leopard was furious about being made a fool of and said, “Here monkey, hop on my back and see what’s going to happen to that conniving canine.”

Now the dachshund saw the leopard coming with the monkey on his back. But instead of running, the dog sat down with his back to his attackers, pretending he hadn’t seen them yet ... and, just when they got close enough to hear, the dachshund said.....

“Where’s that darn monkey? I sent him off half an hour ago to bring me another leopard.”

I returned this week after being away for eight days at a clergy gathering called CREDO. CREDO is a program put on by the Church Pension Fund as an educational,

spiritual growth and vocational discernment exercise. It was a very intense, demanding, and worthwhile time; one that will inform my ministry for a long time to come. In my CREDO class, there were twenty-seven priests and eight staff members. That staff was made up of four priests, a deacon, a physician and several lay people, all with great skills and experience.

When we walked in to the conference center on the first evening, we were told that rule number one of CREDO was, “always wear your name tag.” As I said, there were 35 of us involved in the conference and the organizers wanted to make certain that no one was ever called by the wrong name. Over the course of the week, we all pretty well learned each other’s names, but we used the tags right up to until the end, just in case.

Jesus told the Temple authorities, “My sheep hear my voice. I *know* them, and they follow me.” Throughout the 10th chapter of John, Jesus repeatedly tells His listeners that He is the shepherd who *knows* His sheep by name.

In this morning’s reading from Revelation, St. John tells of a vision of heaven in which he is standing before the throne of God. He tells us, “there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb,” This great multitude – this group beyond number – this gathering of tribes, peoples and nationalities is Jesus’ flock. These are the sheep whose names are all known by Jesus. This part of John’s vision is meant to

portray for us the innumerability – the complete vastness of those who belong to Jesus; those whom He *KNOWS* by name.

I couldn't help but think about this great multitude as I thought back to the difficulty our CREDO group had in learning what we know of each other. Thirty-five people and it took us most of a week to learn each other's names and a little about each other's stories. We worked at it and as the week unfolded, we began to know each other on some very basic level. But there are still a few people with whom I participated in the conference, about whom I know very little. Unlike me, Jesus knows *ALL* of His sheep.

We all want to be known by name. I ask you all to wear name tags so that we never have to go through the embarrassment and guilt that we feel when we forget someone's name. Through all of the weeks, months and years that I have brought people up to the altar rail and blessed them on their birthdays and anniversaries, the one that stands out to me the most is the one in which I could not remember Kelly Gray's name. That is the power of a name. The guilt associated with the memory of forgetting a parishioner's name still stings, months after the event. My forgetting Kelly's name made a difference to me, because *knowing* the name of members of the flock is what the Good Shepherd does, and what we "junior shepherds" are *supposed* to do.

Names are important. Names identify us and begin the process of letting people know who we are. Names can label us – for good or ill – for life. We all know people who, when we got to know them, made us think, "Boy is that person named correctly.

He really lives up to his name.” And we all know people whose names simply make us whisper under our breath, “What was her mother thinking when she named her?” We begin to make decisions about people as soon as we learn their names.

In just a few minutes, two families are going to come forward and bring their precious, newest family members to be baptized. In the 1928 Prayer Book, immediately before a baby had the waters of baptism put on his or her head, the priest said, “Name this child,” and the parents and Godparents announced the name. Now the naming is done at the beginning of the baptismal process, when the child is presented. But either way, saying the name of the baptismal candidate aloud is an important part of the process. In it and through it we are saying, among other things that this new member of the Body of Christ is also one of Jesus’ flock – one of those whose name is known.

In a minute, parents and sponsors are going to stand in front of you and (somewhat nervously) announce the names, Abby Claire Codrington and Alex Philip Rodney Stokley, and we will perform the ritual and celebrate the sacrament of baptism – in and through which these two will be reborn in water and the Spirit and will become members of the household of God – spring lambs in this flock.

Abby and Alex, here today, in this gathering of God’s faithful people, we formally welcome you as full members of this Body of Christ which is so important to us. I know that neither of you understands what I am saying to you right now, but hopefully your baptismal sponsors can pass these thoughts along to you when you get a little older.

You are both lambs of Jesus' flock. That is the ultimate blessing of life.

Each of you is known by name. The Good Shepherd knows you and will be with you. As the Psalmist alluded; He will always be with you to revive your soul. He will always be there to guide you along right pathways for his Name's sake. And though at some time, you will most certainly walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you never need fear any evil; because Jesus is with you; His Shepherd's staff, will protect and comfort you. Surely His goodness and mercy shall follow each of you all the days of your life, and you will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

Jesus is calling. He knows your name. You recognize His voice already. Come forward and be known among the Body of Christ by your names, Abby Claire Codrington and Alex Philip Rodney Stokley; the newest lambs of the flock. Amen.