

Devotions for May 16-22, 2011

Monday, May 16, 2011: *I Am* Daily reading: John 10:1-11

The context here is a contentious discussion about Jesus' identity. While the Pharisees may not know Jesus' true identity, they certainly know that they don't like him! Jesus doesn't follow the rules. In fact, he seems to make up his own rules, forgiving sins and healing on the Sabbath. Even Jesus' own family doesn't know what to make of him (7:1ff). But the people are quite taken with Jesus, and wonder if he is the Messiah (7:25ff). Jesus reveals his identity not only through his actions but through seven "I am" statements, poetic word pictures that express his identity and purpose. By using the divine name ("I am" or "ego emi"), they point to Jesus as the Son of God. Find the seven "I Am" statements. How do they relate to each other? Who do you think Jesus is? Which of his "I am's" is most important to you? Ask God to reveal Jesus' identity to you more clearly.

Tuesday, May 17, 2011: *Images* Daily reading: John 10:1-11 again

Here Jesus uses figures of speech, referring to sheep, shepherds, gates, gate keepers, thieves and strangers. Jesus not only seeks to reveal himself through images his audience knows well (they know more about sheep, shepherd and gates than we do); he also connects into the rich reservoir of Old Testament prophetic writing. Prophets frequently use shepherd imagery when talking about leaders (remember that Moses and David were literal shepherds before taking on the mantle of leadership). Jesus is a master at speaking in a context that his audience understands. These metaphors place real importance on the Shepherd, the one who has the best interest of the sheep at heart. Do you see Jesus as your Good Shepherd? Ask God for faith to trust this Good Shepherd for all things.

Wednesday, May 18, 2011: *False Shepherds* Daily reading: Ezekiel 34:1-6

Jesus' shepherd imagery in John 10 taps into Ezekiel 34, a scathing indictment of corrupt leadership, bad shepherds who did not care for God's sheep. Just as Ezekiel shouts a warning against false shepherds, Jesus condemns the Pharisees who refuse to accept him as the Messiah. God's true sheep know the shepherd's voice, so the Pharisees are clearly not listening (see John 10:11ff). They are instead the thieves and bandits who do not have the sheep's best interest at heart. This intensifies when we note that the John passage takes place during the Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah), commemorating Judas Maccabeus' rededication of the temple. This feast reminds people how unfaithful leadership had "slept with the enemy" (Hellenists) in their recent history. From this perspective, a core theme in this passage is a condemnation of the Pharisees. Look out for false shepherds! Are you following a false shepherd in your life? Ask God to reveal who might not have your best interest at heart.

Thursday, May 19, 2011: *Sheep* Daily reading: Isaiah 13:13-15

Most of us aren't honored to be called sheep. Sheep are stupid, defenseless and utterly dependent upon the shepherd; not adjectives that independent, ladder-climbing Americans embrace. Yet we are vulnerable, in need of protection. We know the voice of the shepherd and follow him. We run from a stranger because we do not know his voice. We find good pasture through the good shepherd. While it may not be a compliment that Jesus calls us sheep, it illustrates how dependent we are on the wisdom and goodness of the Shepherd's heart. Are there times when you feel utterly defenseless? Ask God to make you more dependent on God's goodness.

Friday, May 20, 2011: *Jesus as Shepherd* Daily reading: Hebrews 13:20-21

Jesus, our Good Shepherd, has our best interests in mind. He is obedient to God's will. He knows his sheep by name. (Shepherds did know their sheep by name in the first century, and still do today in Palestine). Jesus does not drive the sheep from behind, but leads them by going ahead. He has come to save the sheep, leading them to good pasture (life abundant). Jesus goes ahead of us and calls to us by name to follow him. We can trust him because he has our best interests at heart, and knows where to find the green pastures and still waters. Are you trusting Jesus to be your good Shepherd today? Ask God for faith to trust Jesus as the Good Shepherd.

Saturday, May 21, 2011: *Reality Check* Daily reading: Matthew 10:16-23

We need a reality check about the dangers of the wilderness and predators all around us. Just ask a recovering addict how safe it is out in the world; how many voices, predators and dangers are around every turn. Does the world have our best interests in mind? Do the world's pathways lead us to green pastures? Only the Good Shepherd can deliver that. God calls us to a spectacular vision for the future, but to make the journey we need to dedicate ourselves to hearing the voice of the Shepherd, in prayer and through engagement with the Bible. Do you have a realistic sense of the dangers that surround you? As you pray and engage with the Scriptures, ask God to help you discern what predators may seek to harm you.

Sunday, May 22, 2011: *Still Waters* Daily reading: Psalm 23

In this beloved Psalm we read the soothing words that bring comfort and promise us "green pastures and still waters." Again, we have a shepherding image of God leading us to places that will nourish, sustain and protect us. We don't need to be afraid, because the Good Shepherd is with us. We don't need to worry about provision, because the Shepherd prepares a feast before us. We can sleep safely because this God is a protector. These images provide comfort and healing for those of us who are harried by the worries and troubles of each day. Do you need some still waters in your life? Ask God to lead you to places where you will find comfort, rest, and healing.