

FOLLOWING THE GOOD SHEPHERD

BY BISHOP PAUL-GORDON CHANDLER

Just after the electing convention last September, Bishop Michael Marshall, a British bishop who has had a profound influence on my spiritual journey and who may be our guest speaker at an upcoming clergy and spouse retreat, wrote me the following words.

"Do resolve to recover with the help of God a true icon of the episcopate, and although it is geographically a huge diocese, you will have a small enough number of clergy whom you can really get to know well and help to keep their faith and ministry bright and gospel-centered, and all as the *pastor pastorum*."

Pastor pastorum, in Latin, would often be translated today as "pastor of the pastors." However, its literal translation is more accurately, "shepherd of the shepherds," and it was a phrase that came to be used by St. Augustine of Hippo in North Africa, near where we used to live in Carthage. I have also always loved Pope Gregory's definition of a bishop, back in the late 6th century, as being "a servant of the servants of God." This is how I would describe those bishops that have had a significant spiritual influence on my life...both to me and to the congregations I have served.

“THERE CAN BE NO BETTER MODEL FOR ME, OR FOR ANY OF US FOR THAT MATTER, THAN THE ONE WE REFER TO AS “THE GOOD SHEPHERD.” ONE OF THE FAVORED NAMES OVER THE LAST TWO THOUSAND YEARS FOR JESUS IS “THE GOOD SHEPHERD” – THE ONE WHO LAYS DOWN HIS LIFE FOR THE SHEEP, WHO KNOWS HIS SHEEP BY NAME AND LEADS THEM BESIDE THE STILL WATERS.”

I have been reminded of this daily for many years because wherever we have lived around the world, including now in Casper, we have hung a depiction of "the Good Shepherd" created by the noted artist Daniel Bonnell. He gave it to us just prior to our move as a young family in 1993 to the ancient city of Carthage, Tunisia, North Africa, to serve as St. George's Anglican Church. Daniel Bonnell, a good friend, did a drawing that served as a study for what ended up being a beautiful painting of "The Good Shepherd." He not only knew that North Africa and the Middle East were pastoral societies but also that this drawing would remind us of the comfort found in knowing Christ is our "Good Shepherd."

The most ancient representation of Jesus "in human form" can be found in the catacombs of Rome and in the church of Dura Europos, a town on the right bank of the Euphrates River in today's Syria dating to A.D. 235. There Jesus is depicted as a "good shepherd," carrying a sheep on his shoulders, symbolizing one who comes to our rescue. It was a figure that in time became very popular. There is no question that when early depictions of Jesus arose, the preference clearly was the figure of the Good Shepherd.

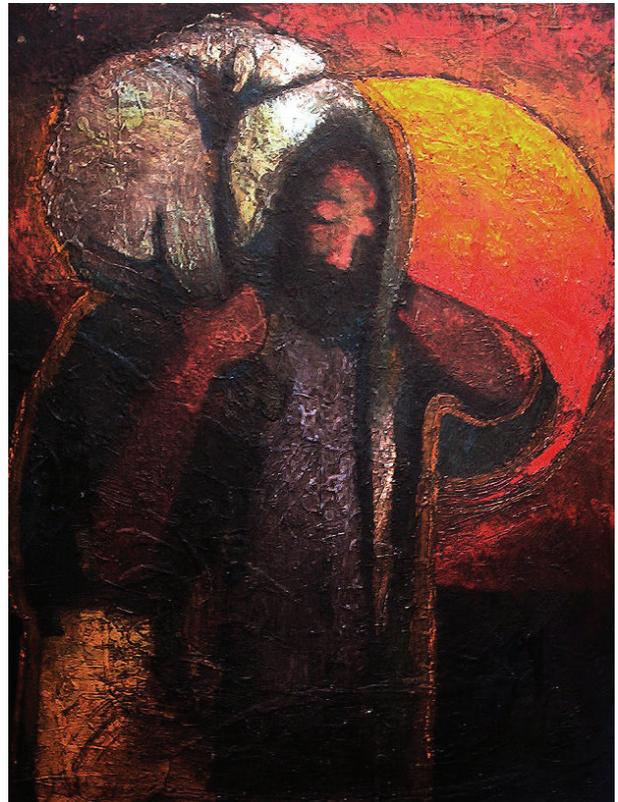
I have always been struck by how Jesus' two statements about himself in John 10 are positioned next to each other. Jesus first says, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." And then immediately says, "I am the good shepherd." His giving us abundant life, both in our lives and church communities, is intricately linked to his being the "good shepherd." No picture has drawn people to Jesus with such magnetism as the good shepherd; who cares for his sheep, who lets them rest and waters them, who feeds that part of them which is hungriest and most in need of feeding, who leads them, who never withholds himself, who watches over them, preserving and protecting them.

In a day when many people don't know what a bishop is and does, I look to the "Good Shepherd" as a model, wanting to be spiritually nurturing and coming alongside as a servant, toward seeing us all thrive in depth and breadth, and being able to minister to others with cups full.

I close by sharing a thought I have returned to again and again by the 13th-century Sufi mystic and poet Rumi; "Be a lamp, or a lifeboat, or a ladder. Help someone's soul heal. Walk out of your house like a shepherd."

May our Good Shepherd guide us as we journey together, following wherever the streams and pastures may lead us.

Take hope,
+ Paul-Gordon



DANIEL BONNELL
THE GOOD SHEPHERD
OIL ON CANVAS