

Sheepish tendencies

Gillian Cooper *reflects on* John 10:11-18

I am not sure I like being called a sheep. In my limited experience, sheep are rather stupid creatures, who roll on their backs and get stuck, get out of their fields onto the road and fail to find a way back to safety, and bolt in the face of imagined danger. I admit lambs are cute and grown sheep can be handsome, but on the whole I like them better for their knitting wool than for their characters.

On the other hand... perhaps I have some sheep-like qualities. I have been known to get myself into sticky situations and need help to get out of them. I can go off course and not know how to get back on track. I can be scared of inappropriate things, and fail to see real danger. Perhaps a shepherd would be quite useful.

In Jesus' time, when wolves roamed, when there were no fenced fields and sheep travelled between pastures, they faced constant danger. Step forward the good shepherd, the one who is attentive to the flock, who stands up to all dangers, who in the last resort gives his life for the sheep's safety. Our good shepherd has given his life, and we live under his protection. Our mistakes and wanderings off course do not matter, because we are being herded gently to our ultimate destination in the pasture where we can relax for ever. 🐏



Jesus, good shepherd, grant us your protection we pray. Guide us in the right path, keep us in times of doubt and danger, and lead us through the valley of the shadow of death to our seat at your table. Amen.

The Church Fathers

Part 5, Irenaeus

by Richard Gunning

Irenaeus (c. 130-200) hailed from Smyrna in Turkey and became Bishop of Lyons in France. He wrote that he had heard Polycarp preach.

He was noted for his role in guiding and expanding Christian communities in the southern regions of France. In his writings,

Irenaeus was one of the earliest of the Fathers to regard all four Gospels as "the truth", and he quoted extensively from them and the letters of St Paul. In the Church, he wrote, the apostles lodged the truth, as in a bank: "all the rest are thieves and robbers".

His best-known work was *Against Heresies*, an attack on Gnosticism. In contrast with the Gnostics, Irenaeus believed in the unity and the goodness of God, and referred to Jesus and the Holy Spirit as the "hands of God". 🐏

“ Our power of addressing Him... and listening to His still small voice, depends on our will being one and the same as His.”

Florence Nightingale (1820-1910), English social reformer, statistician and the founder of modern nursing

Introducing Rosie

by Gillian Cooper

Rosie is a six-year-old cavachon. She loves food, tummy rubs, and meeting people. She is definitely not Poppy: less clever, more cuddly. I adopted her from a brave family who realised they did not have enough time for her.

Rosie is happy to walk miles on her little legs. I have to watch carefully to make sure she does not eat every bit of stuff she finds on the path – no more admiring the scenery! I am learning what she likes and what she understands. I say “no” and



“leave it” quite often, without much effect.

I wonder whether God is as exasperated by my slowness to learn and my inability to know what is good for me. As my love for Rosie grows, I am thankful that my failure to listen to “no” and “leave it” does not diminish God’s love for me. 🐕