

The last couple weeks, I've had a lot of discussions with people about reading the Bible and I don't think I've given any of them a really good answer. Reading the Bible's very hard. It's really hard. When I started my discernment process, one of the things that I brought up in my committee meeting was, I do not know scripture. And I needed to learn a way that I could learn more about it. The pastor in my committee was a fantastic person. He did such a great job. He gave me a list of like 20 books. So I bought the top three because I'm like there's no way I'm gonna read 20 books. And I tell him this, I tell them, I'm like okay these are the books I got. This is the Bible I got.. This is the study guide I got. This is this that I got, he's like great. How are they? I'm like, what do you mean? How are they?

So the study guide he gives me, I'm like, okay I'm going through it. I'm going through it, and I tell them this. And he's like, so how are they? I'm like, well, I find this good and this bad. He's like, good; I've never read them.

Well, why did you give me the list? He's like, well, it's because you need to find what works for you. He's very good about giving me things that I need to find that works best for me. But it's true. Reading the Bible is very hard, and there are so many different Bibles out there. How do you pick which one's right for you?

Now, the one that I read is the new revised standard version, that's the one that we use mostly in the UCC. We've got them in the pews. But the one that I read is the updated version because the ones in the pews make no sense to me at all. But then, there are other churches that use translation Bibles like the Tinsdale Bible, where it summarizes everything, and you don't actually have to figure out what they're trying to say. And those are nice ones too. And to be honest, some of our scripture readings, I go to the kids Bibles because sometimes you got to see it like a kid to figure it out. It's really hard.

And the study guides, 90% of the study guides are garbage. They are written by someone to teach you how they read it. And what it says, what it says to them, not necessarily what it says to you. And that makes it even harder because what if you don't agree with what they say. You're starting off failing right away. So that's always a hard spot too. And so I keep telling these people the same story, and they look at me much like most of you are looking at me. Like, What's the answer? It's a hard one, right?

Today's reading is one of those. The Bible was written at a time for very specific people. You know, the Old Testament was written for Jews. During that time, the New Testament was written for the beginning of Christianity. So it was taught in ways they can understand. There's over 500 metaphors, using shepherds and sheep as examples in the Bible. That is fantastic; if you are a Shepherd. But we are not. It makes it even harder to understand sometimes because we don't know anything about raising sheep.

You know, Wednesday, I was talking about the sheep and the goats. That makes perfect sense to shepherd and goat people.. But to those of us now, it doesn't make any sense. So taking the Bible from what it was and putting it to where we are may be completely different things.

You know, if God went to one of the prophets and said, okay, I want you to talk about the bad, the evils of social media, that would have made no sense at all to them. But it would have helped us out a lot right now. So what do we do? How do we do these things? Well, today's reading is one of those readings that makes absolutely perfect sense to shepherds. But every time I read it, I learned something new.

You know, whenever we do examples, we pick a hundred, right? Because it's a nice easy number. In this case, a hundred is about as many sheep as a shepherd can handle by himself. That's why I picked a hundred. That is the edge of his limits. That is, as far as anyone can go during that time. Realistically at 100 they probably have another shepherd with him. For the example in today's reading is, that is somebody who has stretched as far as they can go. In our world today, that's somebody that has to deal with their family, has to figure out how they're getting their kids to school, how they're figuring out how they can pick up their kids, getting to work, working, not having a good co-worker. Somebody kind of just rides you all the time and is a pain, you know. That's going to push you to the end of your limits, having to deal with gas prices, having to deal with your grocery bills, having to figure out how you're going to pay for your electricity, your water, your gas. How you're going to drive, your car breaks down. All these things push us as far as we can go. And that's what they're talking about. Here you're talking about being as far as you can, and now you have one more problem you have to figure out because that sheep has wandered off.

Now, the shepherd has to take care of that one sheep because the Sheep is everything that they have. It's their source of food. It's a source of milk. It's your source of wool for clothing. It's your source of income because we're selling them off for offerings. It's their offering to God as well. So they can't afford to lose one sheep in this. They have to do everything they possibly can to come together. And it's a lot of work. But it's worth it, right? It's worth finding that one sheep. So, it's important.

It's important to remember that sometimes we are the shepherd. We are stretched as far as we can go. But we still continue on and sometimes, we're that one sheep And God is the shepherd. And even though we stray, and we do things that we're not supposed to, we sin because we all sin. He's still going to be there and bring us back. And he's going to be happy and grateful because that one sheep has come back. You have the 99 other sheep, the righteous sheep, the good people. The people who don't need God's grace all the time because they do the right thing. I would love to meet 99 people who do the right thing every day. That'd be hard. It'd be real hard, but it's still a possibility. And he knows that there's all of those people that are out there. They're doing the right thing, but he's still there for them. He's guiding them too. He just doesn't have to spend as much time guiding them as he does that one.

And what about those other 99 sheep? They're not just there. They're also helping, right? If you ever watched a herd of sheep or cows or anything, you got a couple that lead everybody to where the food is. And you got a couple that lead everybody to where the water is. And you got a couple that are just kind of gone. They're off on the sideline on the side. But are they really? Are they just sitting there on the side, or they're watching for others? Are they watching for that one that got away and trying to get them back? Are they watching to make sure that there isn't any danger on the outside? And they're protecting everybody on the inside? They're all working together, much like everybody works in a church. We all find ways to get together. Now, if we were reading the Bible, wouldn't that be easier to read it like that to try to decipher things?

We don't know it is, but God speaks to us, and how we can hear it. He makes an effort to reach out to us in ways that we can understand. We might not fully understand at the time, but he talks to us in ways we can comprehend. He talks to us in ways that we need to hear it. Sometimes we need to get hit over the head with a brick. That's how some of us learn. That's

how I learned for a very long time.. He takes care of us. In ways that we need. He helps us in ways that we can, we just need to listen. And that's the hardest part, finding ways to hear him. Even when we're looking for ways to hear him, we don't always hear him. That's what the rest of us, the other 99 are there to help you hear them. We can do that if you're working together, Let us pray.