

Are you my Mudder?

Rob Gieselmann, Easter 4A, 2014

11 May 2014

When I would read PD Eastman's book, Are you my Mother? to my kids - they were four or five years old at the time - I'd emphasize the word, *mother*, roll it around, and send it out into the air between us, as *mudder*. Are yooouuuu my *mudder*?

You remember the story. A mother bird flies off to find food for her baby bird, who is just about to hatch the egg. The egg hatches while she's gone, baby bird sees no one, so he runs off in search of mom. He encounters and asks various animals, "Are you my *mudder*?" Each in turn denies it, until finally the hatchling stumbles upon an earth-mover. He jumps up onto the steel bucket, looks it in the eye - and asks it, "are you my *mudder*?" The bucket suddenly moves, rises, and just when you think the baby bird is in serious trouble - the earth mover gently drops him back into the nest, right when mommy bird returns. They are reunited, and forever happy. Are you my *mudder*?

Mother represents home, or safety, or nurturing, or all three - And I'm sure that it is the concept of *mother* that some people seek when they first come to church.

As a single dad - I might use the word, *parent*. As I remind my kids every year, don't forget me on Mother's Day! But doesn't everybody sort-of want somebody else to care for them - to feel the sense of being *enveloped*, protected, secure. Reminds me of that old Gershwin song, *Someone to watch over me* ... and talk about getting it right when combining this sense of maternal security and today's *Good Shepherd* - all in one: *I'm a little lamb who is lost in the wood, I know I could, always be good, To one who'll watch over me* ... Little lamb, and perhaps you think of the standard Victorian image of Jesus as Good Shepherd -

At St. Paul's in Maryland, someone installed a Tiffany knock-off window - way out of place for the 300+ year-old colonial architecture - of that same blond Jesus clean as a whistle, in his bleached white robe - carrying an equally clean sheep straddled across his shoulders. Kindly, bringing the wayward sheep home. *I seek out to save those who are lost, Jesus says. Those who are mine. Someone to watch over me.* And I'm pretty sure the salvation and

shepherd business is far dirtier than depicted - but maybe the point is the same.

*How old were you when you finally realized that you were no longer a child, or a teen - that you were fully an adult? I think I was 35 - I'd already completed two graduate programs, practiced law for 7 years, and had been married for two. I had supported myself financially from the time I left home, at 18. But I still didn't know what it felt like to be an adult. It wasn't until I had my first child - Perhaps there is something about the responsibility of it all - of having someone to watch over ... rather than to be watched over. Only then could I use the term, *man*, rather than, *guy*, referring to myself. Life changes forever when you become a parent - As one pundit said, *when you become pregnant, you become pregnant for life*. Or the mother who observed, *a mother's life - is to live for your child*.

*The image of Good Shepherd has a long Scriptural tradition. The 23d Psalm portrays God as a kindly shepherd, and religious leaders are regularly called, *shepherd* - although most often by prophets who castigated the leaders for shepherding poorly. So when Jesus self-identified as both shepherd and gate, the religious leaders knew exactly what Jesus meant. But they didn't understand. They didn't understand, you see, because Jesus used this shepherd metaphor to make a point over against them. They had just ejected a blind man from the Temple. In their narrow world, being blind meant he had done something wrong - something unacceptable to God - and was thus unclean. But Jesus welcomed him, despite their rejection - and looking at this blind man out of one eye and the religious leaders out of the other, Jesus declared said, *I'm the good shepherd*. Meaning, I seek and save the lost. Come to me - I'll welcome you. *Someone to watch over me*, And I know - that there are people here today who have been rejected by others the same way the religious leaders rejected the blind man - and are in desperate need of care. And acceptance. And to you, I say, "*welcome home*."

The Good Shepherd - clean or dirty - brought you here for a reason, for your care. But to you who are here and not in need of acceptance or care - You are perhaps spiritually or emotionally healthy - and it is harder for you to appreciate the image of the shepherd. You, frankly, don't feel all that lost. Some people don't. To you I would say -

stand guard. First, stand guard that you don't become complacent - or worse, that you don't assume the elitist posture of the religious leaders, who, rather than save the lost, *rejected the lost*. Of course you wouldn't do this intentionally - We're good-natured people. But perhaps you might passively - by *not greeting* the visitor. Frankly - by *not* sliding down the pew so someone can sit next to you. By not inviting someone to church. There are lots of passive ways one disdains the lost. And St. Stephen's - above all else - wants to be a place where people feel found - cared for, welcomed. For that is the work of the Shepherd - hence, is you *your* work - Second, I truly believe that there is a dark force out there that would persuade you and me to compromise - to live mediocre lives rather than a dynamic lives of meaning. Be vigilant as the Shepherd is vigilant. Look for ways to improve your life - so that the black and white outline of your life is colored-in with meaning. That - by the way - is what Kaiser Permanente calls *thrive*. And, it is what every mother wants for her child - that he or she will find a meaningful place in life. So - I'm way past wandering the streets asking people, "Are you my *mudder*?" But I'm not beyond asking, "Are you my *shepherd*?" And better yet - I'm not beyond offering to shepherd, welcome, and care for others.

I hope you aren't, either. Happy Mother's Day.