



God will judge how pushy, troublesome, and destructive we have been – so that we can be set right with one another? . . . Whether God’s reordering of the flock is good or bad news seems to depend on what kind of sheep we’ve become. . . . You may have noticed that I have a few sheep here for examples.

Are we soft and squishy sheep? You know that quality of hug-ability really hasn’t been a good “match” with social distancing, has it? Or perhaps we have been “too soft” when it comes to social justice issues or having difficult conversations about systemic racism or economic bias. Overly soft sheep tend to shy away from hard things.

But what if we have become tough as nails sheep? Does that mean that we’ve become so rigid in our beliefs that our own sense of “being right” prevents us from hearing any other viewpoint? Or perhaps we don’t even notice when we push past others to do things our way, or to have things work out to our own advantage? Overly tough sheep don’t always notice the harm they do to others, but also don’t shy away from hard things.

Can God help us to combine the robustness of our tough tendencies with the softness of compassion and empathy? Can God help us to hold fast to our integrity and faithfulness – while respecting the integrity and faithfulness of others? Can we humble ourselves enough to make room for other sheep? To welcome those who might be different from us? Can we humble ourselves enough to be corrected by God, and to accept God’s forgiveness – in order to then act with mercy and extend forgiveness to others? Can we become resilient sheep that trust in our shepherd’s care and leading? Do we know the Lord is God? And that God made us, and we are God’s? Do we know ourselves to be God’s people, and the sheep of God’s pasture?

If that’s what we know and believe to be true, then we should follow the advice of the psalmist and make a joyful noise to the Lord by coming to God with singing, and worshiping the Lord with gladness! We should give God thanks and praise for the Lord is good, and God’s steadfast love endures forever. We should be thankful that God’s faithfulness lasts forever – for all of God’s sheep.

It is good news to have God claim us as God’s own sheep. It is good news to be part of God’s flock. It is good news that needs to be shared with sheep who have strayed, who have been injured, or who feel they have no home and no one who cares for them. God desires to be their shepherd, to have them know the comfort of being part of a beloved flock. Do you know sheep who need a true shepherd? There’s room in the flock for them.

Amen.