

The Voice of the Shepherd
April 21, 2024

Based on John 10:11-16, selected verses.

When Jesus says, I AM, throughout the Gospel of John,
he evokes the name of God revealed to Moses at the Burning Bush.

God tells Moses, when speaking to the people, to say:

I AM has sent you.

Forever thereafter, the fundamental divine truth is wrapped up in *being*.

When Jesus says I AM throughout the Gospel of John,
he invokes the being of God through his own human being
as an interconnected oneness among all that has been created.

I AM, Jesus says, in and through *The God Who Is*.

The God Who Is, in me and through me:

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

evokes such classic images from the 23rd Psalm

as provision and care and solace

protection and correction and connection.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

lives life for the sheep.

Then the words become playful and evocative for our time
here the words become mystical and mystery-revealing for our moment

as the word for *good* in Greek

can also mean *beautiful*

and the words for *lay down his life*

can also mean *breathe on behalf of*,

and we are reminded, as Richard Rohr tells us,

that another name for God:

Ya - weh

is in fact a full breath,

with its inhale: Ya

and its exhale: weh

Try it and see ... Ya - weh; Yah - weh

So that every breath we take is in fact invoking Divine Presence
and every breath is proof that I AM,
The Good Shepherd,
also known as The Beautiful Protector
is already breathing in us and through us and on our behalf.

Every breath is a mystical union of creature and creator
from the human breath to the bird breath
to the tree breath to even the great of the sea,
uniting the entire universe
in one great inhale and exhale.

Yah - weh

And when Jesus tells us,
through the Greek of John's Gospel,
that he *knows* his sheep and his sheep *know* him,
in the same way Abba God *knows* Jesus
and Jesus *knows* Abba God
he is using the mystical, esoteric
word for knowledge - *gnosis* -
the kind of spiritual *knowing in our bones*
that has nothing to do with the rational
and everything to do with the relational.

This is the same *knowing* the Bible uses to refer to
the *knowing* between those who are married:
an intimate, caring, sacred
and yes, sexual knowing in body and soul.
A holy union of one-ing while remaining uniquely particular.

This is the *knowing* Jesus describes
between himself and us, his flock,
between himself and the I AM of God,
in whom all things were created,
which means this is the knowing of holy union
of intimate marriage among ALL OF CREATION!
With every breath we take,

with every one-ing we make, we remember
WE ARE MARRIED TO EVERYTHING!!

Which on this Earth Day Sunday
is a *really big deal*,
as we mark the worst bleaching of coral reefs ever
due to increased ocean warming
from each of the last ten months
that has recorded the hottest month ever,
leading even the most
doomsday climate scientists to fear
their models of global warming
have been too *conservative*.

And we wonder
what in the world are we doing to the water,
to whom we are married,
and with which we just baptized baby Olive,
and what in the world are we doing
to the bread and the wine,
to whom we are married,
on which we will feast on next week
and what are we doing
when the pollen, to which we are married, comes out
before the pollinators, to which we are married, do?

What do we do on this Earth Day Sunday
when it seems as if
the one great intermarriage of everything
is descending into bitter divorce
at the exact same moment
we have re-discovered our betrothal
in the marriage of sun and earth and moon
mere weeks ago
through a total eclipse of our intermarried hearts
and the awe and wonder that ensued
as even the most rational of scientists
could only gape in gratitude for the gift
of what their mathematical calculations describe
as some sort of *cosmic accident*
but what their innermost spirits experience as cosmic covenant?

What do we do,

Yah - weh?

Yah - weh ...

Inhale - exhale ...

I AM

The Good Shepherd

On this Earth Day Sunday
in the Season of Easter
Two Thousand Twenty Four
as we celebrate the Sacrament of Baptism,
and Jesus insists

he has *other sheep*
that do not belong to this fold
perhaps we might hear him
referring - for us, today -
to the water and the earth
and the moon and the star
including our sun.

Perhaps when Jesus speaks of
other sheep

he refers today to the grain and the grape,
and the coral and the pollen.

Or perhaps he refers to the *actual* sheep
and maybe even the actual goats,
and maybe Jesus is insisting to us mere humans
that we must *also* comprehend them
as part of the divine flock.

Or maybe *we* are the lost sheep
of the divine flock.

Maybe Jesus is telling us today
on this Earth Day Sunday
that he must bring *us* to himself all over again,

to remind *us* of this intermarriage of all that is.

Maybe Jesus is telling *us* to listen to his voice
and remember, remember, remember:

Ya - weh, Ya - weh, Ya - weh

I AM

[in our second *translation, which is my own,
based on the mysticism inherent in the Gospel of John]

The Good Shepherd,
The Divine Presence,
The Beautiful Protector
breathing on our behalf,
in us and through us and among us.

All of creation is married to itself -
an intimate union -
mirrored in Abba God's
intimate union with Jesus
and the reciprocal intimate union
between Jesus and God.

[This is the mystery of Baptism.]

Not everyone understands this.
We do not even understand it ourselves.

But for the sake of all that is,
we MUST
come to comprehend
this message.

*"Incarnational translation for preaching seeks to recontextualize biblical texts so that they say and do in new times and places something like what they said and did in ancient times and places" (Cosgrove and Edgerton, **In Other Words: Incarnational Translation for Preaching**, 62).