

Alleluiah! Christ is risen!
Christ is risen indeed! Alleluiah!

The Bible has this way of comparing people to sheep,
which is, in my opinion,
lame.

As a metaphor, comparing us to sheep seems half-baked
because sheep lack all kinds of things that we humans do, in fact, possess:
sheep can't think for themselves, but we have intelligence;
sheep are obstinate and must be conditioned, but we can reason and be
convinced;
sheep are smelly and dirty, but we have always had hygiene rituals.
When creating us, God endowed us with all kinds of qualities
that make us *unlike* sheep.
That's why I think the sheep metaphor
falls short.

BUT . . . and there is a but . . .
sheep do have one feature that makes me like being compared to them.
Sheep have wool.
Wool: fleecy coats that grow thick and can be shorn.
And wool is useful.

Now, sheep can't *make* themselves grow wool.
They can't grow it faster or slower.
They can't control the color of wool they grow.
And they can't *use* the wool they grow.
But,
once shorn,
sheep's wool
is very useful.
It can become yarn,
and yarn can be woven into fabric,
and fabric, well, *that can serve people*.

Just ask Tabitha
from our Acts reading today.
She knew about wool, fabric, and service.

Tabitha was a female disciple,
the only woman ever called the unique term for female disciple in the New
Testament.

(I feel that's important to mention here on Mother's Day).

Tabitha, like many women in the church before and after her,
was "devoted to good works and acts of charity"
which she performed among other women.

After all, it's the widows of the community
who are the ones keeping vigil over her deathbed.

Tabitha's main service involved working with cloth and making garments.

When Peter came to her upper room,
he saw the tunics and other clothing Tabitha had spun,
hanging in the windows almost like advertisements of her craft:
garments she had woven, weaved, cut, and sewn.

It's possible that the grieving widows are wearing Tabitha's handiwork,
modeling for Saint Peter how she used the wool at her disposal
to serve them.

Serving them by selling the finely made garments and sharing the profits.

Serving them by donating the tunics to women in need.

Or maybe even serving by teaching these widows
how to make the garments themselves
in a collective workshop
so the marginalized women could maintain a livelihood.

No wonder they want her back after she died.

For upon Tabitha's death,
her community remembered that Peter was in the next town over
where he raised a man named Aeneas from death to life
by calling on the name and power of Jesus.

So, they got Peter to come,
and after praying in private, Peter raised Tabitha from the dead too.
And as a result of her rising,
many believed in the Lord.

By all accounts, Tabitha was a "Good Sheep."
And as a Good Sheep, she served.

Tabitha willingly gave up the wool she possessed
to serve others.
She actively shared her faith with other women
and used her skills and vocation to actively serve the people around her.
In this way she was also very much like Jesus,
the Good Shepherd,
who fed and healed and commanded us to clothe.
Tabitha's life reflected that of The Lamb,
the Most Good Sheep named Jesus.

For a sheep does its greatest service
when it gives up the wool it grew;
and when others take that wool and make meaning or effects out of it,
making it into soft yarn and warm sweaters and beautiful quilts.
So the greatest thing the sheep does
is to hand itself over
and lose the thing it spent its life (or a season of its life)
growing.

We see this in Jesus' life.
Christ truly served humankind
when he handed himself over to be shorn of his dignity
and to die on the cross.
Yet through his death, God saves us;
and because of his resurrection,
we believe in resurrection for ourselves and the world.
In his dying and rising, Jesus handed us the spiritual materials and effects we
need
to make soft yarn and warm sweaters and sheltering quilts;
Jesus gave us the power and freedom and love and hope that we need
to serve others.

And while she clearly performed great service throughout her life,
Tabitha's greatest service
was in dying,
because through her death,
she gave up her materials and effects;
and God took them and her

and worked goodness and resurrection,
mending the faith of her devoted friends
and sewing hope and belief into the lives of others.

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The sheep metaphor, at a certain point, breaks down,
as all metaphors do.

We are not, literally, sheep.

But perhaps the Shepherd is calling us to be like them in their wooliness:
calling us to willingly gave up the wool that God grows upon us
to serve others.

No, we may not be sheep,
but we are, to use our phrase from the past weeks,
Easter People.

And as Easter People, we, like Jesus *and* like Tabitha,
have died—died to sin and brokenness and self-involvement and despair—
and been raised—raised by God to new lives
of faith, hope, love, and service.

And as died-and-risen Easter People,
we can consider how to best use the wool God makes grow from within us.
We can imagine how to give up the materials and effects
God places in our lives
for the sake of others.
We look for how God wants to use us to work goodness and resurrection,
how God, like a Good Shepherd calling the sheep,
calls us to serve
for the sake of the world.

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Christ is risen indeed! Alleluiah!

AMEN.