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## *We are the People of His Pasture and the Sheep of His Hand*

**A sermon by the Very Reverend Sam Candler**  
**Atlanta, Georgia**  
**The Last Sunday After Pentecost**

I walked to church last Sunday morning. But I was not in Atlanta. My wife, Boog, and I were in the delightful city of San Antonio, where I had preached and prayed at a beautiful wedding. I give thanks this week for beautiful weddings! Souls give themselves to each other.

Last Sunday, I did not know my way around San Antonio, but my soul-mate and I set out searching for the church.

What a glorious walk we had, shepherding each other. I give thanks this week for folks who walk together! Actually, Boog and I rarely enjoy an opportunity to attend church together. Usually on Sunday mornings, she and I are working separately. I am in the Cathedral nave, shepherding prayers and words and worship towards the kingdom of God. Boog is in the Education wing, shepherding families and children and visitors toward the kingdom of God. We both love what we do, but we rarely enjoy the moments together.

We were seeking, last Sunday, to rectify that. We were headed to beautiful St. Mark's Episcopal Church, the first Episcopal church of San Antonio. We walked down a tough street, among the homeless and the dirty. One man offered us some old yellow roses. An old woman guided two young children through the intersection. It is a good thing to walk the early morning city streets together. Some sort of marathon race was being run, and we had to wait patiently, patiently and pleasantly, for the gallant runners to pass before us. I give thanks for folks who use their bodies!

At church, what fun it was to sit together! At church, my wife and I can sing with one another. I take the bass part, Boog takes the alto part, and it is downright fun. We pray. We listen. We smile when the preacher tells a joke or makes an excellent point. Attending church with the person you love is one of the most satisfying events in the world. Enjoy it!

Well, in San Antonio, we had worshipped and we were walking back to the hotel. The marathon was finishing up, and stragglers and exhausted humans were strolling down the street. The homeless had waked up a bit.

We walked and watched. Most of the streets in San Antonio seem to be one-way streets for traffic, which is another reason it is good to walk. As we waited at one intersection, we noticed a car make a left-hand turn in front of us. Suddenly one of the homeless men shouted something, but I couldn't make it out. Then the second car also made the same left-hand turn. The homeless man shouted again, "Wrong way."

Another homeless guy got up and started moving out into the street. A third car in the procession then made the same left-hand turn. "Wrong way, wrong way, wrong way," the homeless guy kept shouting.

In the end, four cars made the same mistake, following each other like sheep walking off the cliff. Every one of them made a turn going the wrong way on a one-way street. Each was lost and just following the misguided driver in front of them.

It was the homeless guys who were able to notice the mistake. It was the homeless guys who got up off the park wall and

started trying to direct traffic the right way. It was the homeless guys who really knew the city. It was the homeless guys who were shepherding the lost sheep.

In the lessons for this Sunday, the Lord God says, "I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out" (Ezekiel 34.11). It is a comforting verse. When we have lost our way, and when there seems no shepherd around to help us, or when all the shepherds seem misguided themselves, then Yahweh himself will guide us. God will come to us directly.

I give thanks for God showing up when we have made a wrong turn. But how does God show up?

The gospel for today delivers a startling answer. Jesus identifies himself with the poor. "I was hungry and you fed me. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was in prison and you visited me."

"When did we see you that way?" All the folks ask. Both the sheep and the goats asked the same question. They did not understand that Jesus, King Jesus, Lord and Savior, had actually appeared to them in the persons of the poor. "Inasmuch as you have done it to one of the least of these, you have done it to me."

When we serve the poor, we are serving Jesus. It should be no surprise that the poor can actually be a great help to us. When we have lost our way, obese with too much food, drunk with too much luxury, when we have made too many wrong turns in life, when we have argued too much about inconsequential things, it is the poor who can lead us back to the gospel.

I give thanks today for God's presence in the poor, God's presence in those who do not seem as well off as I am. God is showing me something through those folks.

While I was learning in San Antonio last Sunday, Bishop Mdimi Mhogolo of Tanzania spoke here at the Cathedral. He told us tough stories of poverty and illness in Tanzania. His refrain, if you recall, was "God looks on in silence." It was a powerful story.

But God is not always silent. God speaks, too, in the lives of the dispossessed and the hungry. God speaks in the people we serve food to at the Peachtree-Pine Shelter. God speaks in the prisoners that we visit in the Atlanta City jails. God speaks.

I give thanks today for those who serve. In a few minutes, we will honor the servant ministry of Bobbie Williamson, who has been our Canon for Children's Ministries for eleven years. We give thanks for her because she has shown us service. Will someone else arrive who can show us the same thing? We pray so!

I give thanks today for folks who are giving so generously to this community of faith. This place needs you! You can serve through the gifts God has given you.

Finally, I give thanks for Jesus himself, the Great Shepherd of the Sheep. Jesus does guide us, and usually Jesus guides us through folks whom we think are weaker than us: the poor, the outcast, the children, the elderly, the weak, those who seem to live quite contentedly on less than we live on.

We all need God to be our shepherd. I hope that's why all of us go to church. I hope that's why all of us give at church. I give thanks when God shows up in our giving and in our serving. But it's wonderful when the Shepherd turns up in the people and places we least expect.

AMEN.

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Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip

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