

**Reflection:**

For today's reflection, I would like to offer a poem about love.

*Love (III) by George Herbert*

Love bade me welcome. Yet my soul drew back  
    Guilty of dust and sin.  
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack  
    From my first entrance in,  
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,  
    If I lacked any thing.

A guest, I answered, worthy to be here:  
    Love said, You shall be he.  
I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,  
    I cannot look on thee.  
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,  
    Who made the eyes but I?

Truth Lord, but I have marred them: let my shame  
    Go where it doth deserve.  
And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?  
    My dear, then I will serve.  
You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:  
    So I did sit and eat.

**Sermon: The Good Shepherds We Don't Deserve**

If God makes it so easy for us to love Him, why is it so hard for us to do it?

Reading today's Gospel selection, we see that Jesus—as the good shepherd—loves all of us, even the “other sheep that do not belong to this fold.” Unlike the hireling, who flees the sheep at the first sight of the wolf, the good shepherd chooses to lay down His life because He cares for the sheep and welcomes all of them into his flock.

Such instances of His compassion and grace fill the Bible. Even when Peter denies Jesus three times, as Jesus predicted, Jesus welcomes him back into his flock. Perhaps it is best put in the first six verses of Psalm 23:

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
he leads me beside still waters;  
he restores my soul.  
He leads me in right paths  
for his name's sake.

[PAUSE]

Why? Why does God restore our souls when we so often err? What have we done to deserve the good shepherd in our lives? We are all imperfect beings, humans who, like Peter, will go on to deny Him in our lives and yet find God's love anyway. Why does God still love us so unconditionally?

This concept of grace is one that I have never been able to fully wrap my head around. I see it in my life so often, particularly in God's unconditional love, but also with my parents, and I still don't understand. Today, I'd like to take a few minutes to talk about my parents and our relationships with the people in our lives who love us unconditionally, even and especially when we don't necessarily deserve it.

To preface this, I will say that, as an only child, I am probably the biggest nuisance in my parents' lives. Not probably, definitely.

When they brought me to restaurants as a kid, I would smash my utensils on the plate like I was playing the marimba. When we went to Disney World, not only did I drop both of their room keys out the window of the SkyTrain, but I also manually locked all the doors of our rental car while the keys were inside as they checked the luggage at the airport. And without fail, whenever we went to the bank, I always managed to trip the car alarm because I got bored of waiting the 2 minutes it took them to deposit their paychecks.

Yet, no matter how stupidly I act, how ungrateful I am, or how many times I annoy them, they indulge me. They come visit me when they don't need to, they answer my calls when I wouldn't even answer my calls, and they love me even when I act like I don't love them back. Often, I wonder why they love me so much. I certainly don't deserve it, yet they offer their love at every opportunity.

In many ways, my parents are the good shepherds in my life, and I am their flock. They lay down their lives for me even when they don't have to and accept me even when I deny them. To be completely honest, I don't understand it. As a student of history and political science, I always have learned that things happen for a reason—person A did this, causing person B to do that, and then event C happened because of person A and B's actions.

Unconditional love doesn't work that way. It's quite frustrating. I can't explain it, yet it happens nonetheless. I think that's the paradox of unconditional love: we've done nothing to deserve it, yet the good shepherd loves us no matter what. There's nothing we can do to deserve it, and there's nothing we can do to change it.

So I guess that brings me back to my original question of why. Why does God love us when there's nothing we have done, do, or could do to change his love for us? He sees our weaknesses and our failings, and he loves us anyway. He recognizes that our homes, our politics, and our institutions are imperfect, and he offers His grace regardless.

Maybe that is why though. God knows that there are wolves out there, and He steps in because He doesn't want us to be alone and unprotected. He wants us to know that we are loved, no

matter how badly we mess up or how far we stray from Him. He sent His son to lay down his life for us, so that the good shepherd could lead us beside still waters and in right paths.

**Reflection Room Question:**

Now, as we enter our Reflection Rooms, I invite everyone to join me in thinking about one place, in your life or your relationship with God, where you see a good shepherd. What does it mean to be not “hired hands” but good shepherds, who, by listening to Him, lay down our lives for others?