I imagine that like me,
you have heard more sermons on the Good Shepherd
than you care to recount.
Sermons which explain that
shepherding in first century Palestine was not
the romanticised image we have frequently made it to be,
but rather a dangerous, risky and menial occupation.
You know all that.

With a text so familiar,
it can be difficult to discover fresh insights.
However, one of the great advantages
of texts from John’s Gospel
is that Jesus has rather a lot to say;
much more for instance,
than the Jesus presented in Mark’s Gospel.
This means that Jesus breathes life
into the image of the good shepherd
by coming at it from a number of different angles –
the good shepherd **in relation** to the sheep,
**in contrast** to the hired hand,
**in unity** with the Father.
Each layer adds to the theological richness of the image.
As Sara Lee would have said, “Layer upon layer upon layer.”

Which means that there is every possibility
that we might discover something that we hadn’t noticed before. What leapt out to me was Jesus’ simple but bold assertion that,
*“I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold.
I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice.
So there will be one flock, one shepherd.”*

David Lose notes that
“Despite his healings, despite his preaching,
despite all that he had already done and planned to do,
**Jesus isn’t [finished] yet.**
He still has more sheep to reach, sheep that are not in this fold. By extension, [Lose suggests]
God isn’t [finished] yet, either.
And this matters for at least three reasons.

First, God continues to call people from all walks of life,
from every nation on the face of the earth,
and from each and every generation
across the nearly two thousand years
since Jesus first uttered those words.
If that were not true, you and I would not have come to faith” and we certainly would not be here gathered online.
We’d be out picking up takeaway brunch.

I wonder how often you reflect on how you came to faith?
How was it that the good news of God
came to be good news for you?
What people or events shaped your life
so that your ears were opened
in order to hear the voice of Christ,
saying “follow me?”

*“I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold.
I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice.
So there will be one flock, one shepherd.”*

The second reason that this statement is significant
is the reminder that God is at work
**in our midst** and **through** us (you and me)
to extend the invitation to abundant life
offered by the Good Shepherd.

I remember years ago,
hearing a story on the radio about
a farmer working the land of an expansive hill country station. Frequently when herding the sheep,
the working dogs got out of earshot of the farmer.
Commanding and coordinating them became difficult
because of the terrain.
And so this particular farmer developed
a radio microphone with a corresponding head set for a dog.
This simple use of technology meant that
(without the need to raise his voice)
the farmer could prompt the dog from a great distance
to “come away,” “come by” or “get in behind”.

I find this story helpful in understanding how God might use us
to invite others to faith.
Could it be that God is prompting you
– without ever raising God’s voice –
to pray for someone, to offer care,
or to speak of **your** experience
of the expansiveness of God’s love?
This passage reminds us that God uses us
– yes, you and me –
by our acts of generosity or gratitude,
by our faithfulness in prayer,
and by virtue of the transformation we have experienced,
to reach out and embrace God’s beloved sheep
from beyond this fold.

I wonder whether God might be nudging you
in a particular direction
to demonstrate the limitless love that God has for all humanity.

*“I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold.
I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice.
So there will be one flock, one shepherd.”*

The third reason this statement is so important
is that those who will one day constitute Jesus’ flock
are beyond our imagining.
There is a tremendous expansiveness in this,
and we cannot comprehend the limits of the fold Jesus describes. All we know is that Jesus – and therefore God –
isn’t [finished] yet.
Jesus is still calling, God is still searching,
and in time **we will all be**, as Jesus says,
one flock under one shepherd.

There is real reassurance in here
for those of us who might hold concern for friends or family
who have left the faith,
or see little point in God and God’s people,
or have married people of other faiths.

This passage reminds us that God works
in ways beyond our imagining
to bring together one flock,
and that Jesus Christ’s mercy and grace are for all.

What gives us that confidence?
Just this: Jesus is the Good Shepherd,
the one who laid down his life for the sheep – all the sheep! – and who was raised to life once again,
validating his sacrifice and promise.
Which means that while we may not know
all that God has in mind
for those who have followed different paths,
we can trust them all to the mercy and grace
of the Good Shepherd.

I wonder if you worry about someone you love,
wishing they might know the love of God?

Perhaps then you might pray
that God would work in and through you (and in fact all of us)
to share the abundant life we’ve experienced.
And perhaps you might also pray
that you and in fact all of us
would grow to trust to God the fate of all God’s children
simply because of the faith God showed in us
by sending the Good Shepherd,
the one who lays down his life
for you and for me
and for all people
out of nothing other
than sheer, abiding, and eternal love.

*“I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold.
I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice.
So there will be one flock, one shepherd.”*

Thanks to be God.