



Responding to Love with Love

A six year old child in the atrium considered the found sheep that the Shepherd carried in Luke 15:4-6. I guided him to the usual responses: how safe, loved and protected was that sheep in the arms of the Shepherd. This child wanted to imagine, instead, how the sheep could carry the Shepherd. "But the Shepherd is so much bigger than the sheep," I countered. Then as we restored the materials, the child began sorting the sheep—half of them look up in a listening stance, and the other half bow down as though grazing. He lined up these two groups facing each other with their shoulders touching and finally laid the Shepherd across all of their backs. The figure fit perfectly, and the child gave a sigh of satisfaction. After a moment, when he was preparing to leave, I wondered aloud, "Why would the sheep want to carry the Shepherd?" "Because they love him," was the simple and obvious reply.

Even as I write this account and discuss it with others, I find new meaning in the surprising reversal of roles. As the child prepares to leave Level 1 at age six, there is often a shift from a primary need for love and protection, to a desire for action and eventually a personal response to the love of the God. The gift of love becomes a calling to the older child, and perhaps this child was eager to see the sheep show their love for the Shepherd. As this happened the first week after Easter, I also began to meditate on the ways Jesus was carried on a colt coming into Jerusalem and later by His followers when He was removed from the cross. How does this apply to us today? How do we, as the church and flock of the Good Shepherd, carry our Lord? Though He is the source of love and strength, we may lift Him up by caring for the poor, by proclaiming the Word, and by nurturing His body. My prayer is that we will do all these things, in the way that Jesus modeled, as the child clearly saw, "Because we love Him."

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