

Lamb and shepherd

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*For more commentary on this week's readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page, which includes Moore-Keish's current Living by the Word column as well as past magazine and blog content. For full-text access to all articles, [subscribe](#) to the Century.*

Ezekiel 34:21-22 provides a particularly poignant image of God the shepherd's care for the "least of these":

Because you pushed with flank and shoulder, and butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you scattered them far and wide, I will save my flock, and they shall no longer be ravaged.

Reading these verses reminds me of a day several years ago, when our family visited a local petting zoo in Atlanta. This animal preserve houses many fluffy, scaly, and feathery creatures, and visitors can purchase crackers to feed to several of the animals.

One of my daughters particularly loved the goat pen, and she enthusiastically pushed cracker after cracker through the fence to a small goat, who devoured the treats with gusto. Unfortunately, one of the larger goats soon caught on to the situation, and he rammed the smaller goat with his horns, forcing a pitiful squeal from his smaller cousin. To make matters worse, the little goat got his horns stuck in the chain-link fence, so he was unable to extricate himself and escape the ram's repeated head-butts.

The situation was eventually resolved, with the intervention of a staff member. But it made me wonder where we stand in this scenario. Though I want to identify with the little goat, I have to confess that I too often participate in the bullying behavior of his older cousin. As a "first world" citizen, my comfortable lifestyle depends on the cheap labor of others, mostly invisible to me. How are we—those of us in positions of

privilege—actually “pushing with flank and shoulder” against our neighbors? How do our actions resemble those of the “false shepherds” of Israel, rather than the righteousness of God? What will God the shepherd—what will Christ the king—say to us when he comes in glory?

This week's readings also bring to mind a particular congregational song: “You, Lord, Are Both Lamb and Shepherd,” with text by Canadian hymn writer Sylvia Dunstan. The imagery of lamb and shepherd makes a particularly strong connection with the Ezekiel text, but the entire hymn plays on the paradoxes of Jesus Christ, who is both weak and mighty, both death and life. Its text has thus appropriately been known as “Christus Paradox.” It's #274 in the Presbyterian hymnal *Glory to God*.