

April 26 Easter 4A (John 10:1–10)

Animals know kindness from cruelty—even sheep, who are not the sharpest tools in the shed.

by [Amy Leach](#) in the [April 2026](#) issue
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When we were auditioning to be a foster home for puppies, the Rover Rescue lady came to our house to see how our dogs acted around us. Although, with dogs there is no acting—no seeming, no feigning, just jumping for joy when the beloved comes home or scrambling at the sight of a slam-bang toddler. Teri (the RR lady) and I were inside the house, and Annabelly (the Labrador) could hear my husband clearing his throat as he walked up to the house. She started flinging herself into the air, over and over, to look through the little square window up high on the front door. (From the other side you could see a shiny black head appearing and disappearing, ears afloat.) *It's you, it's you, you're home, you're home!* We could act—we could act real nice, talk real nice, be whizzes at filling out foster puppy applications—but the real test was, Are your dogs happy to see you when you come home?

“The sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” Animals know kindness from cruelty—even sheep, who are not the sharpest tools in the shed. When I was a kid, we used to sing a song called “I Just Want to Be a Sheep (Baa-baa-baa-baa).” As the song goes on to say, we did not want to be Pharisees or Sadducees—those learned devils—we wanted to be muttonheads. I take umbrage with this song. Better to sing “I just want to be a goat, maa-maa-maa-maa,” because at least goats are savvy, canny, independent—versatile enough, historically, to get sailed around the world and dropped off on tropical islands. Goats hit the world running; sheep are sticks-in-the-mud. We may as well have been singing, “I just want to be a potato.”

And yet sheep are smarter than potatoes, and maybe smarter than humans, too, if they run away from the thief and toward the shepherd. Lord knows my soul's been rustled, tons of times, by entities who don't make my life more abundant but subtract from it—time thieves, thought thieves, sleep thieves, passion thieves. Not only do they not have my best interest in mind, but they are also largely boring. When I'm being sheep-smart and I really listen to the different voices I hear, I am drawn to Jesus' voice not only because it's benevolent—he's not looking to turn me into lamb chops—but also because it is interesting. The vitality of that voice makes a lot of other voices sound like blah-blah-blah.

Many times I've read books or heard sermons that sounded to me, even as a child, like blah-blah-blah consider the lilies blah-blah-blah the first shall be last blah-blah-blah do not worry about tomorrow blah-blah-blah. The voice of Jesus is alive, rather than rotten and decomposing, rather than plastic, predictable, textbooky. It's electric and lively, and it offers extravagant life. “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” The last word of that sentence, translated from the Greek ????????, means over and above, more than necessary. The necessary is great, but the Bible appears to have been written by people who were not all about necessity, just as the world appears to have been created by someone other than the God of necessity. See, for example, gazelles, Mendelssohn, Montana.

Right now in my little house in Montana the electricity is out. But really the electricity is on, because I still get to read, in my Great-Grandmother Dorothy's Bible, electric words transmitting the electric wisdom of a first--

century rabbi via his “beloved disciple.” A dog who looks like a wrinkly pig-bunny-toad is gazing at me. Out the window the moon is sharp and silver. Moon, dog, words, warmth—it’s all abundance. Not that the heart isn’t harried, not that the head isn’t achy, but life is full of extras. It is not just something to get through, like a textbook. (Actually, I feel like life itself is an extra, an abundance, an anomaly.)

One more point. The thief is coercive, taking the sheep by force. The shepherd is not; he doesn’t use electric prods or leashes so the sheep will follow him perforce. He knows their names; he draws them by name, rather than by leash, and the gate is such that “they will come in and go out, and find pasture.” Come in, go out, Samuel Sheep and Sherry Sheep, Eddie Sheep and Lola Sheep, you are not captives and there are no VIS (very important sheep). There are just particular sheep with particular names, and the shepherd knows you all. Come to think of it, a VIP is as silly as a VIS. I’m just a P along with other P’s, and along with other P’s and S’s, I have my own personal name and I’d rather not be rustled and I’d like to be extra alive.

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