

2004 Cumberland Presbyterian Women's Ministry Convention

Theme: Be Shepherds of God's Flock: Glorify the Lamb!

Symbol: The Good Shepherd/Lamb

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. (I Peter 5:2)

He tends his flock like a shepherd; He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young. (Isaiah 40:11)

For the lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. (Revelation 7:17)

Theme Hymn: *Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us*

Theme Songs: *Glorify the Lamb and Hallelujah! Praise the Lamb*

*Little Lamb, who made thee?
Doest thou know who made thee?*

These are the first two lines of the poem *The Lamb*, from *Songs of Innocence* by William Blake in 1789. The poem continues by asking the little lamb who clothed and feed her, who gave her a voice to rejoice. Finally, Blake tells the little lamb about the Lamb of God, the One who clothed, feed and blessed her! This is the challenge before the Church today: to remind those around us, especially the children and youth, who made them and gave them life. There are people and situations in our American culture and world today that will try to answer this question of identify and provision for children and teenagers. The movie industry and reality-life television tells them that only the strong, beautiful and popular people will make it in this world. Advertisements tell them that only if they wear certain clothes, drink a particular soft drink, or have a zillion CDs they will “fit in and be somebody.”

Real life is not found in Reality TV or in sports figures or movie stars. Real life is a mixture of good and bad. Real life is parents who love their children and churches who honor and respect their young. Real life is also poverty and hungry children. Real life is schools and communities that will seek out ways to nurture and care for their children and youth. Real life is also child abuse and fear. Real life is after school activities and playgrounds that invite all children. Real life is also homelessness and life in a shelter. Real life is stomachs that are full of nourishing food. Real life is also illiteracy and underemployment. Real life is playing outside after dark. Real life is also war and terrorism. Real life is a mixture of the good and the bad.

The prophet Isaiah in chapter 40 encourages the children of Israel as they struggle with real life; life in exile. The Israelites were displaced and far from home, in essence they were homeless. They missed their routines of worship and community life. They longed for the familiar comforts of home, of well-balanced meals, of leisure and play time. Isaiah comes to them with words of comfort and encouragement. As a Shepherd God will provide for all their needs. Verse 11 tells them that God will gently carry them through the difficulties of real life. The Prophet Isaiah is a loud reminder to the children of Israel that it was God who made them.

It is now up to the church to remind the little lambs who made them. While I Peter 5:2 is technically written for pastors and church leaders, we can read it indirectly to address anyone who cares for others, especially the young...parents, grandparents, Sunday school teachers, teachers, employers, business owners, aunts, uncles, others. We are to care and instruct the “flock” because of our calling and passion, not because of any misguided sense of duty, or power, or hope of reward. Whatever God has called us to do we are challenged by Peter to do it as a example of the Good Shepherd, the Christ.

It's exciting to think about the throne of heaven in Revelation 7:17. It is there that all tummies will be filled, all children free from abuse and pain, all will be fed and clothed in righteousness, and each will have a “home.” The challenge is before us as members of God's flock – let us seek to “Be shepherds of God's flock” and thereby “Glorify the Lamb!”