

Goat versus G.O.A.T.

Have you ever heard of someone being referred to as a G.O.A.T.? If you have it with the “capital” or upper case letters, you are referring to someone as the “Greatest of All Time.” Those of us who live in New England have certainly heard Tom Brady being called the G.O.A.T. It is much different than being called a “goat” or an “old goat.”

So, why have goats been designated as “bad?” Goats had a bad reputation long before the time of Jesus. How many of us have heard the term “scapegoat?” The original scapegoat comes to us from an early commemoration of Yom Kippur or the Day of Atonement. As they do today, the Hebrew people fasted and atoned for their sins. The other thing they did was to designate a goat who would carry their sins away as they chased it and beat it with sticks. This was first mentioned in the Book of Leviticus. Eventually it turned into a pair of kid goat. Anyway, we now use the term “scapegoat” as someone we blame for the actions of others.

The image of sheep being “good” has been present for thousands of years. The thought of God being the shepherd comes to us from Psalm 2. Historians and Scripture Scholars believe that Psalm 23 was written around 1000 years before the birth of Christ and that Ezekiel was written about 500 years before Christ. Jesus even refers to himself as the Good Shepherd, an image that stays in our mind even to this day. As odd as it would seem to Jesus in his day, we would now think of Jesus as the Greatest of All Time or the G.O.A.T. in the model of how we are to live our lives.

Models for living have been shown to us for thousands of years by the prophets, Jesus of Nazareth, and his followers. The leaders of “The Way” were people who spread the Good News of the Gospel with examples of how to live their lives in preparation for the second coming of Christ. How would those early people who practiced what would be known as Christianity be

ready? First of all, they'd pay attention to the words of Jesus so that they'd be considered among the sheep and not the goats?

They certainly had plenty of opportunities to practice, especially if they had access to the readings that we have today. The fat sheep are the "not so good sheep" while God will go and look among the lean to "bring them back to the fold." Surely, we want to be God protects those who are weak, especially those who will heed the call to come back, according to Ezekiel. The psalmist acknowledges that we are the sheep of God's pasture.

Our Gospel story tells us that in order to be counted among the sheep at the end time, we must treat each person as they are "the King" or God. We recognize that we are the body of Christ, as Paul tells us, and that we should treat ourselves with respect. Shouldn't we do that with everyone? We certainly made some great headway with that this past week as we prepped food, collected food, collected donations, hosted people, fed people, and welcomed them into our church. We prayed with members of at least seven different congregations on Tuesday night. People commented that they were so happy that we again have the Ecumenical Service. We will continue to do this each year. Our church will take its turn to feed those in need again this Tuesday at the Community table. We will continue to collect food for those in need for the food pantries in Westfield and Southwick.

It is crucial that we practice our faith with people around us. We simply can't do this at Thanksgiving or Christmas and rest on our laurels. It is a constant circle in which we do this. We feed the hungry, give drinks to the thirsty, clothe the naked and cold, visit the sick, lonely and imprisoned. Our opportunities to do this are limitless. We do this in our churches, our Thrift Shoppes, as well as through various agencies in town, such as the Westfield Food Pantry and Southwick Food Pantry. We had over twenty people in our kitchen and hall as we set tables and

peeled/cut 175 lbs—yes, 175 lbs of potatoes! Southwick collected 75 lbs of stuffing, cranberry sauce and gravy. People came in Tuesday to mash and get things served. It was a great day to be at First Congregational and Southwick Congregational churches.

As we head into the Season of Advent as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ, let us do what we can, and push ourselves a little further, to bring about the reign of God on earth. Let Christ be not only the G.O.A.T. but the King! Let us prepare our hearts so that Jesus can be born again in them. May we be ready to bring about the Kingdom or Reign of God here in the Westfield-Southwick area.