

4 Easter C 2019 SML
JN 10:27-30

Scholem Asch is one of the greatest writers of Jewish/Christian literature. He tells the unforgettable story of Jesus. For unbelievers, Jesus was the radical preacher from Galilee, but for us believers, Jesus is the Son of God. With unparalleled historical immediacy, Asch's inspired work presents a sweeping panorama of the Holy Land nearly two thousand years ago . . . As if Asch were a shepherd contemporary of Jesus' time, Asch writes:

As Jesus spoke, the storm-wind came and seized upon the four pillars of the earth, and there went past a great noise and shouting, with thunder and lightning; and the wind combed with combs all the grasses and growths of the fields, and bent their crowns to the earth, once this way and once that way; and the wind came among the branches and thought to break them. And then the storm was released in a downpour and we shepherds sought shelter each one where he could. And the flock of sheep made a circle about Jesus and pressed to His feet, as if they sought shelter in Him, for their shepherd had forsaken them. And as they stood thus on the slope of the hill, the storm-wind returned and it seized

on one of the lambs that was on the edge of the fold, and the lamb was lifted up in the teeth of the wind as if it was in the teeth of a wild beast, and the sheep clung with his feet to the clefts of the rock. But the teeth of the storm-wind was stronger than the feet of the lamb, and the wind lifted the lamb anger and flung him down the slope of the hill into the abyss. And it was so, that when the lamb was carried toward the abyss they called to the shepherd with the cry of animals. But the shepherd heard not the cry of the falling lambs, for he had hidden himself from the anger of the wind in a stone cave.

And when the rained ceased, we sought Our Lord and we could not find Him. For each one of us had found himself a hiding place from the storm-wind under the shelter of a stone or in a cave, and we had not seen that Our Lord had gone down to the abyss after the fallen lambs. And we sought Him here and there and found Him not. We called, "Lord, Lord," and He did not answer us. Then when a while had passed, we saw Our Lord coming up out of the abyss, and His garment was soaked by rain, and the water ran over His feet, and His hair and His face were wet. His feet were bare, and they bled from having been dashed against the

stones, and he carried a lamb on His shoulders as He returned to the flock. And when we beheld how He came up from the abyss with the lamb on His shoulders, we shepherds ashamed before Him, as we remembered our forefathers who had also been shepherds, all of them, and I learned by meditation on my Lord now, what the sages had learned of Moses. “Moses was tending the flock,” (EX 3:1) meant that God first taught and tested Moses through sheep, so our sages say . . .

Sheep aren't smart. They tend to wander into running creeks for water, then their wool grows heavy and they drown. They have no sense of direction. They need a shepherd to lead them to calm water. So do we! We, like sheep, tend to be swept away by waters we should have avoided. We have no defense against the evil lion who prowls about seeking whomever He might devour.

Isaiah (53:6) reminds us, “We all have wandered away like sheep; each of us has gone his own way.” We need a shepherd to care for us and to guide us. And Jesus is that Good Shepherd. The Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. The Shepherd who protects, provides, and possesses His sheep. The Psalmist says: The Lord is my shepherd!

(Psalm 23). The imagery is carried over to the New Testament as Jesus is called the good shepherd of the sheep. (John 10:14-15).

The good shepherd does not provide us with an image to which we can readily and easily relate to today. 2000 years ago, yes, but not today. So I'll continue with another analogy, to which we can all relate. Not "I am the Good Shepherd," but "I am the Invisible Woman . . ." The invisible woman writes:

As mothers, we are building great cathedrals. We cannot be seen if we're doing it right. It started to happen gradually
...

One day I was walking my son Jake to school. I was holding his hand and we were about to cross the street when the crossing guard said to him, "Who is that with you, young fella?"

"Nobody," he shrugged.

Nobody? The crossing guard and I laughed. My son is only 5, but as we crossed the street I thought, "Oh my goodness, he's walking with nobody?"

I would walk into a room and no one would notice. I would say something to my family - like "Turn the TV down, please" - and nothing would happen. Nobody would get up, or even

make a move for the remote. I would stand there for a minute, and then I would say again, a little louder, "Would someone turn the TV down?" Nothing.

Just the other night my husband and I were out at a party. We'd been there for about three hours and I was ready to leave. I noticed he was talking to a friend from work. So I walked over, and when there was a break in the conversation, I whispered, "I'm ready to go when you are." He just kept right on talking. That's when I started to put all the pieces together. I don't think he can see me. I don't think anyone can see me. I'm invisible.

It all began to make sense, the blank stares, the lack of response, the way one of the kids will walk into the room while I'm on the phone and ask to be taken to the store. Inside I'm thinking, "Can't you see I'm on the phone?" Obviously not. No one can see if I'm on the phone, or cooking, or sweeping the floor, or even standing on my head in the corner, because no one can see me at all. I'm invisible.

Some days I am only a pair of hands, nothing more: Can you fix this? Can you tie this? Can you open this? Some days I'm not a pair of hands; I'm not even a human being. I'm

a clock to ask, "What time is it?" I'm a TV Guide to answer, "What's the Disney Channel?" I'm an Uber to schedule, "Right around 5:30, please."

I was certain that these were the hands that once held books and the eyes that studied history and the mind that graduated summa cum laude - but now they had disappeared into the peanut butter, never to be seen again.

She's going ... she's going ... she's gone!

One night, a group of us were having dinner, celebrating the return of a friend from England. Janice had just gotten back from a fabulous trip, and she was going on and on about the hotel she stayed in. I was sitting there, looking around at the others all put together so well. It was hard not to compare and feel sorry for myself as I looked down at my out-of-style dress; it was the only thing I could find that was clean. My unwashed hair was pulled up in a banana clip and I was afraid I could actually smell peanut butter in it. I was feeling pretty pathetic, when Janice turned to me with a beautifully wrapped package, and said, "I brought this for you."

It was a book on the great cathedrals of Europe. I wasn't exactly sure why she'd given it to me until I read her

inscription: "To Charlotte, with admiration for the greatness of what you are building when no one sees."

In the days ahead I would read - no, devour - the book. And I would discover what would become for me, three life-changing truths, after which I could pattern my work:

1. These builders gave their whole lives for a work they would never see finished;
2. They made great sacrifices and expected no credit;
3. The passion of their building was fueled by their faith that the eyes of God saw everything.

A legendary story in the book told of a rich man who came to visit the cathedral while it was being built, and he saw a workman carving a tiny bird on the inside of a beam. He was puzzled and asked the man, "Why are you spending so much time carving that bird into a beam that will be covered by the roof? No one will ever see it."

And the workman replied, "Because God sees."

I closed the book, feeling the missing piece fall into place. It was almost as if I heard God whispering to me, "I see you, Charlotte. I see the sacrifices you make every day, even when no one around you does. No act of kindness you've done, no sequin you've sewn on, no cupcake you've

baked, is too small for me to notice and smile over. You are building great cathedrals, but you can't see right now what they will become."

At times, my invisibility feels like an affliction. But it is not a disease that is erasing my life. It is the cure for the disease of my own self-centeredness. It is the antidote to my strong, stubborn pride.

I keep the right perspective when I see myself as a great builder, as someone who shows up at a job that they will never see finished, to work on something that their name will never be on.

The writer of the book went so far as to say that no cathedrals could ever be built in our lifetime because there are so few people willing to sacrifice to that degree. When I really think about it, I don't want my son to tell the friend he's bringing home from college for Thanksgiving, "My mom will get up at 4 in the morning and bake homemade pies, and then she'll hand baste the turkey for three hours and press all the linens for the table." That would mean I'd built a shrine or a monument to myself. I just want him to want to come home. And then, if there is anything more to say to his friend, to add, "You're gonna love it here."

As mothers, you are building great cathedrals. You cannot be seen if you're doing it right. And one day, it is very possible that the world will marvel, not only at what you have built, but at the beauty that has been added to the world by the sacrifices of invisible women.

Two thousand years ago, I am the Good Shepherd was a great analogy to help describe Christ among them. Today, to describe Christ among us, it would be I am the Invisible Woman. I am the Good Mother. Happy Mother's Day!