

## **This Little Piggy**

Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. – Matthew 9.36

Jesus didn't have to be snarky about it; he could've called us something nicer than "sheep." Like pigs, perhaps!

Oh, I know there's that whole kosher thing, and that pigs in the New Testament function pretty much for grossing out wayward sons or as roach motels for demons, but actually they're pretty bright.

(<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/10/science/10angier.html>.)

Scientists claim that the little piggie who went to market could have counted out correct change once he got there. Well, maybe not that, but it seems pigs are way up there in the IQ department. Give them a mirror and, instead of worrying about whether they look fat, they find ways to get fatter. That's right: a pig will spot food reflected in the looking glass, calculate the angle, and within less than half a minute locate the booty. Not only that, but they can remember where food is buried and distinguish between larger and smaller stashes. A porker who does not know where the munchies are will tail one who does, and the one who does will try to shake his pursuer.

You can train a pig to do tricks like jumping through hoops and even playing video games. I've read about seeing-eye pigs. Wild pigs form complex social groups and know one another by sight. Then there's that almost prehensile snout that functions to root out difficult food sources and, in some cases, open and close cage doors.

Sheep, well . . . sheep.

They're a notoriously dim-witted lot given to falling over and wandering off. "Sheep," observe Blaine McCormick and David Davenport in their book

Shepherd Leadership, "are not famous for their strategic planning." In fact, some historians argue that the whole species would have died out ages ago had they not signed on to take orders from human beings.

But there you have it: the Lord is our shepherd, not our swineherd. Jesus said he is the door to the fold, not the sty. He told Peter to "feed my sheep," not "slop my hogs." We're sheep, and we'd probably better get used to the idea.

And the idea is dependence, a relationship based on need, trust, and humility. Christians don't root for ourselves, we are made to lie down in green pastures. The same thing holds when we embody Jesus' leadership for our fellow-believers. Peter calls pastors to shepherd their folks as sub-contractors to the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5.2,4).

Perhaps, among other things, this means that our Lord has no interest in teaching us tricks but prefers to teach us to follow. Maybe it means that the healthiest church is not the one that can jump through impressive hoops, but the one that can follow through dangerous valleys. Maybe, after all, it's all about following.

I'll Huff and I'll Puff,

Doug