



# THE WORK OF IMAGINATION

**Devotional**



Immigration and Customs Enforcement has been active in the county where I live and the surrounding counties recently. Officers have surrounded cars, broken windows, and detained people. They have made arrests at grocery stores, farms, and in neighborhoods. In my town, they took a high school student who was off campus during his lunch break, despite his protests that he is an American citizen. They transported him to a detention facility an hour away and held him until evening before acknowledging their mistake. Their presence and conduct have left many people on edge, asking how they can support vulnerable neighbors.

The day after the high school student was taken, the school superintendent of a small neighboring town wrote an open letter to the town. She invited them to participate in an act of solidarity “so small it might seem insignificant.” She wrote, regardless of what else might divide us about immigration or other issues we deem political, a shared sacred value is this:

***Children deserve to feel safe...every day, on every block, on every walk, to and from school.***

And she described how that shared value was under threat:

*Over the past few days, our staff have heard from students who are afraid. They've heard from families who are hesitant to send their children to school. And no matter who we are, what we believe, or how we see the world, this is the bottom line:*

*If even one child in our district is scared to go to school, that is a problem we all must own.*

So she invited residents of the town, when school resumed on Monday, to step out onto their porches from 8:15 until 8:45 in the morning, and again from 3:15 until 3:45 in the afternoon, every day school is in session, until the threat dissipates.

She asked residents to not wave signs. No chanting slogans. No taking sides. Just stand outside and, through their quiet presence, let the children know they are seen, cared for, and loved. That their lives are witnessed to.

Her invitation was simple and powerful: show up for the most vulnerable and scared among us, and say, with our bodies, we are with you. There is no particular skill needed to answer this call. There is no particular knowledge required. There is only the willingness to stand with and for one another, to help one another feel safe.

I'm sure the superintendent wrote the letter on her computer, maybe in her office or at a coffee shop, but I like to imagine her at the edge of a green pasture, wooden crook lying at her side, as she penned the invitation on papyrus. Her invitation is that of a good shepherd. She knows her people, and they know her. She takes a risk and seeks their good. She uses her position to remind them of their belonging. She uses her voice to urge them to remember all they share in common, and to set aside what divides them—even if only for a moment—so they can come together for the well-being of the whole, surrounding and supporting the most tender.

Jesus' teaching about the good shepherd contrasts those who are deeply invested and stay near their sheep, come what may, with those who desert the flock at the first sign of difficulty, seeking first their own safety or satisfaction. Ezekiel condemns those who, given charge of the sheep, ensure they themselves are well-fed before ever turning to the creatures in their care.

Our world offers competing models of leadership, and we do not always get to choose the voices that have out-sized influence on our lived reality. But we can trust that real shepherding and faithful leadership stand with the community as a protective presence, bearing the marks of sacrificial courage. It refuses to pit people against each other for profit or to use them as pawns in a pursuit of power. By encouraging us instead to turn toward each other, it invites us to imagine the healing made possible, the hope generated, when we commit to each other's flourishing and show up together for our shared future.

### Reflection Questions

1. What are some ways your community protects each other?
2. Name someone whose leadership you trust. Why do you trust it?
3. Could you name some "sacred shared values" in your community—truths people would agree on, even if they might disagree about other ideas? How do you imagine activity centered around those shared values?
4. Reflect on a time when the work or witness of a leader motivated you to participate in meaningful action.
5. In what sphere(s) do you have influence? How might you use it to call for courage and compassion?