

# FaithBIT



## Feeling Sheepish Reflection by Cindy Paulson

I was recently reminded, while learning to felt a rug from a full sheared sheep fleece, of my complicated relation with sheep. Yes, sheep!

Several years ago, I was tasked with preaching at a Lenten service on the story of the Good Shepherd. This caused me great angst, not because of the public speaking part (if you know me you know I'll talk to anyone at great length!) but because I have never liked the idea that I was a sheep. Sheep are dirty, dumb, and really smelly—all things I don't want people to think about me!

I was driving down to see my youngest at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa and was stewing about how to handle preaching on this text. I couldn't exactly be honest about disliking the comparison to sheep. As always on that drive, I stopped at a wonderful little farm that sold hand-spun and dyed yarn. When I pulled in it occurred to me I could ask the owner, whose name I learned was Ida, about her sheep. Ida was probably in her 80s but as spunky as could be, and it turned out she was very familiar with the story of the Good Shepherd. When I told her about my dilemma, she brought me out to the pasture. She started calling her sheep in by name and they came running in to nuzzle her. "See," she said, "I know their names and they know me." Touché, Ida.

We went back into her shop and she handed me some stinky, dirty, unwashed wool and then led me to where a couple of women were carding clean wool and spinning it into yarn. The difference between the dirty, smelly locks of wool and the cleaned, carded wool was stark. "Isn't that what Jesus does with us?" Again, point well made.

So last week as I went through the process of turning a dirty, stinky, and honestly quite ugly raw fleece into a beautiful wool rug I thought about Ida and the impact she had on my perspective and faith. As I washed the dirt, gunk (a nice way to say urine and dung) and smell out of that fleece I thanked God I am a part of Jesus' flock of sheep and that he knows my name. And I thanked God for Ida.