

Seeing Beyond

Reflections on art and Christian faith

Figure Riding on Sheep
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Wood carving, 2024

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This little wooden statue rather turns things upside down. The sheep, or ram, is large, its woollen coat sticking out cloud-like, adding extra size and volume. The tiny figure sitting on top and dreamily looking into the distance would, by comparison, probably only just reach up to the sheep's face if it were standing next to it.

The Bible, of course, includes lots of sheep. But it isn't immediately obvious who this sheep could be. It could be us, the sheep that gets lost, but is searched for and found, who lacks nothing because it is made to lie down in green pastures and is led beside quiet waters, who knows the name of its shepherd and who walks in and out of the gate finding pasture. If we are indeed this sheep, then the figure would be Jesus: so light, that he doesn't make a single indent into our woollen coat. A light yoke indeed. One that doesn't weigh on us, that doesn't restrict us, but lets us be fully ourselves. No strict set of rules to adhere to, simply the command to love God and our neighbour - with all the creativity and imagination we can muster each time we face new challenges. And so the sheep stands there at the start of an adventure, not knowing where it will go, where the pursuit of a life of love might take it, what creativity might be demanded of it. The only sure thing is that the shepherd will come, too.

But somehow that doesn't seem quite right. The figure is dreamy and doesn't seem to know where the ride is taking it. It is the sheep that seems to look ahead with confidence and know where it is going. So perhaps the sheep is more likely to be Jesus, the sacrificial lamb. The lamb that takes us upon itself with all our burdens, all our failings, all the times we didn't manage to live up to the potential for love which lies within us. In this case it turns out that the lamb is so strong that its woollen fleece, though soft, is as strong as steel. No matter how heavy our burdens, how many our failings, Jesus carries them all as though they were weightless. And so we sit there on top of the sheep looking into the distance, with the offer of a new and full life always before us. Astounded and wondering where life will take us; how and where we will next experience the life-giving love and grace of the lamb that is our support and guide.

Biblical References

The lost sheep ([Matthew 18:10-14](#), [Luke 15:1-7](#))

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing... ([Psalm 23:1-2](#))

Jesus is the gate and the good shepherd ([John 10:1-18](#))

My yoke is light ([Matthew 11:28-30](#))

Jesus, the sacrificial lamb ([John 1:29-37](#), [1 Corinthians 5:6-8](#), [1 Peter 1:17-21](#))