

Reflection for “Good Shepherd” by Sadao Watanabe



I have had the joy this last month to carry with me a picture of Sadao Watanabe’s “Good Shepherd.” I saved it as the home screen of my cell phone so I have had ample opportunity to look at it— ample, as in several times a day, every day. I appreciate the power of this artistic work. The Holy Spirit uses it to quiet my harried or hurried thoughts & place the Shepherd God-King at the center of my mind. How gentle yet how compelling is this drawing of Jesus cradling the sheep to his chest! It brings to life Jesus’ words from John: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” How clearly Watanabe expresses that this sheep completely trusts its Shepherd! And yet, we know, looking at the whole image, that the sheep knows Oh So Very Little about the God-man who is holding him. The red lines on his tunic are out of the sheep’s line of sight. The background of the piece, also beyond the little creature’s view, is like a scene from another world, the calming undulating lines like “springs of living grace.” The flower-like stars floating in the sky and the blue water-tinted tree place this moment far from the threats of wolves, rocky pathways, and snakes. The Shepherd—you can’t take your eyes off of him—is in motion, in tune with the eternal life so alive around him. Where is he taking the sheep? Doesn’t it make you want to walk alongside? Doesn’t it call you to the place that is yours, near to the Shepherd King?

This is what obedience looks like. This is what being dead to sin and alive in Christ looks like! Praise be to God!

- Mary Kat Cone