

*We are gathering the fell tomorrow* (p.8)

Words of the ‘elder statesman’ of the fell shepherds in one part of the Lake District as the day comes for bringing down the Herdwick or Swaledale sheep from their winter pasture. This is no easy business, as the sheep have minds of their own and can be all over the place. What makes it easier are shepherds and dogs who know their business, and the fact that these sheep are uniquely ‘hefted’ to one area of mountain – that is, ‘taught their sense of belonging by their mothers as lambs’ (James Reebanks: *The Shepherd’s Life* p.9) The two disciples may be some way from Jerusalem at this point but Jesus knows where to find them. They have been ‘hefted’ or baptised in his name and the attachment remains and, like the Good Shepherd he is, he knows how to turn them round and bring them back. He re-invokes their ‘sense of belonging’ and will do this for us, too, at all the moments of our present and future straying. There is a ‘master’s voice’ instilled in us through baptism and scripture and eucharist. For now, ‘the breaking of the bread’ is no longer possible for most of us, but the word remains and our baptism is inviolable. So let our hearts, too, ‘burn within us’ as we hear his voice once again.

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