

THE HEALING OF THE LAMBS

By Lavar Wahlgren, as told to Robert Fitt

This is a true story. Many of the names, and details, in this narrative are fictional; but it is essentially the story of two modern day miracles.

*"He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young."
(Isaiah 40:11)*

A jittery coyote lifted an ear, paused for a long moment, and backed cautiously away as shouts and, laughter punctuated the air on the far side of the narrow valley. But since the two small boys who played there seemed to pose no immediate threat, the furry canine turned her attention to a herd of grazing sheep with rapt interest. She lay silent in the swaying grass. The wind ruffled the hair on her back and ears distractingly; but she was content, for this same breeze would carry her scent far away from the wary sheep.

The late afternoon sun warmed the coyote's back, and time seemed suspended, as her sharp eyes slowly appraised the herd. She scrutinized each one, searching for a sickly sheep, an injured ewe or, better yet, a new-born lamb. It was then that she found her prey -- a small lamb separated from the herd by a full eight feet. The coyote jerked forward and, with a throaty growl, launched her lean frame forward in two willowy bounds that propelled the unwary lamb upward and backward clutched in the relentless teeth of her assailant. The lamb resisted for only a moment; then sagged into grateful unconsciousness.

Ten year old Josh and eight year old Amos loved it when their father let them tend the sheep together. For when the heat was tedious and the hours long, they would sometimes leave the herd and revel in their play. It was so today. They sometimes played cowboys and Indians; but when they played sheriff and outlaw they took turns being on the wrong side of the law; for the outlaw, Butch Cassidy, was their friend. When he came from Robbers Roost to buy supplies, he would often tease them and ruffle their hair. Josh, who was an Indian today, was just repelling a rush of Amos's best infantry, when a sudden commotion among the sheep brought him up short and restored him to reality.

The boys dodged as bleating sheep fled past them, rolling their eyes in uncontrolled terror. The boys were bumped and distracted as the frightened sheep rushed past; but over the top of this ocean of undulating wool, the boys witnessed a scene of carnage that tugged-at their viscera and caused their hearts to sink. A gaunt coyote was shaking a lamb violently by the throat like a broken rag doll.

"*Oh, Josh*", Amos blurted, "*Stop him, he's a-killin' the lamb!*" The response to the child's impassioned plea was immediate. Amos charged the coyote without thinking; shouting hoarsely, and brandishing a broken limb that had only recently served as a weapon in his play. Startled, the coyote retreated a step, dropped his limp quarry, and dashed for freedom.

"Josh, you're a dependable boy." His Father had said solemnly two days before. *"If I allow Amos to tend the sheep with you, you'll have to be especially responsible. He's young, and it's only his second time out, we wouldn't want anything to happen to him, now would we."* Josh thought a moment, considered his father's words, and said:

"I'll see that he's OK Dad. You'll see. I'm a grown boy now". His Father, with a look of pleased acceptance, continued:

"I trust you, Josh, but one more thing: It's easy for two boys to get distracted and forget that their job is to protect the sheep. Things haven't gone all that well this year, and every lamb's important. Be very sure that you don't forget what you're there for, Josh, you will, won't you?" The answer came quickly.

"I will, Dad, you can count on me."

"And can I count on you to do your part, too, Amos?"

"Yes, Papa....thanks for lettin' me go!"

They remembered the cautioning words of their father again as they left with the sheep; and yet, here they stood on the second day out, looking into a pool of blood that stained the ground for several feet around. It seemed that all the blood that the young lamb possessed lay puddled there. And near the edge of that crimson pool a blood-drenched lamb lay as still as death. The boys sobbed-out their grief and fear. Memories of Papa and Mama flooded their minds. They had broken their promise to protect the sheep and had carelessly let one die. What would Papa say? *Oh, what would Papa say?!*

"Save the lamb, Josh." Amos whispered in quiet desperation. *"Save him!"* Josh studied the limp form for a long moment and replied:

"He looks dead to me, Amos. And if he's not clear dead, he's pretty far gone. We're just kids. What can we do?" Amos fidgeted silently for an awkward moment before he spoke. And then, meeting Josh's eyes confidently, he said:

"We can pray, can't we, Josh? Let's pray! God loves His little sheep, and he loves us, too. If we ask Him, He'll help us. He will.... won't he Josh?"

The next moments were seared into the memories of two young boys like the imprint of a branding iron. The power of faith was validated; a knowledge of God's love confirmed; a closeness to God secure. For as the two boys lifted their heads from their simple, heart-felt prayer, a tiny lamb lifted her head, too, and rose shakily to her feet. As she nuzzled her mother for nourishment, the ewe calmly licked the darkening crimson from her woolly coat and let her nurse. The lamb lived. Their childlike faith had wrought a miracle.

As the woolly lamb grew stronger each day, Josh and Amos were jubilant; and, touched by the Spirit, they felt they should do something special for God. Abraham and Jacob had built altars, hadn't they? They would do the same. Using the ax, they drove stakes around the perimeter of the blood stains where the lamb had lain. Then, with a great effort for those so young, they gathered rocks and built a child's monument to a miracle.

Their monument was not forgotten. As they grew to manhood, Amos and Josh would return there often to re-live the childhood miracle that had brought God indelibly into their lives. As their worn boots toed the monument they felt the Spirit bear witness of God's love for His sheep. They stood tall, rededicating themselves to a God that strengthened them, sustained them, and even fought their battles for them. Pledging to help Him, just as He had helped them.

The leaves had turned, the snows had come, and the promise of springtime had awakened the world for two full decades before Amos drove his ancient pick-up past the Boulder Mountains on that hot summer day. He reached the outskirts of Blanding, and had slowed the truck near the middle of town when the Spirit spoke quietly to his mind. : *"Stop the truck"*, it said simply. Amos hesitated, but the words came again: *"Stop the truck...stop it now"*.

And so Amos stopped. As he stepped tentatively out of his model A Ford into the dusty street he noted only a clap-board house, a run-down cafe, and a store with a yellowing sign in the window advertising a special on blue denim. None of these seemed to answer the reason for his coming, and so he leaned back patiently to wait. The silent minutes passed slowly. Only the buzzing of flies broke the spell of the hot, oppressive air. Yet he knew he must be patient, for he had felt impressed to drive to Blanding, and had now been told precisely where to stop. He remembered the lamb. He knew that God had spoken to him, and that he must wait patiently until the purposes of God became clear.

Jed Haws, watching from his Cafe window, had seen the truck stop, and observed the newcomer for a few long minutes. What was he waiting for? Was this the stranger he had been watching and hoping for these many days? He could wait no longer, and walked quickly to greet him.

Amos was grateful for an offer to come out of the heat, and as he slowly sipped a refreshing drink he quickly understood the purpose of his coming. For as Jed backed-out of an adjoining room, pushing the door ahead of him, a small, emaciated, child drooped limply in his arms. Everything about her spoke of starvation. Amos winced, wondering at such deprivation in the midst of plenty; but Jed's anguished words, punctuated with tender tears, cut him off in the thought.

"It looks like we're a starvin' poor Mary, don't it, Amos. But we're not. No such thing. Poor girl's got tapeworms, and she's got 'em desperate. Several doctors has tried to kill 'em. We've even had her back East; but the worms always come back. It grieves us terrible, Amos, for Doc Henley's give her but a week more to live!"

It only took moments for Amos to reach his truck and return with a large plug of tobacco in hand. He had successfully treated his sheep for worms for as long as he could remember. And he now knew that the Lord had sent him here to cure little Mary. Cutting a generous piece from the plug of tobacco, he boiled it until the liquid turned dark—a thick, bilious green. Amos was adding a bit of sugar as he instructed Jed that two doses would be necessary. *"One to kill the worms that are alive today, and a dose tomorrow to kill the larvae."* When the murky broth was ready, Jed spooned-up the poisonous tar that had risen to the top of the pan and measured carefully. He had to be careful. Too large a dose would kill the child. Too little would leave the worms alive. He prayed silently as he judged the size of the dose against the weight of the girl. Satisfied, he leaned toward Mary and gently asked if she could swallow it. Too weak to resist, Mary choked-down the foul brew and struggled to choke-down a meal that had been prepared to help her discharge the dead tapeworms. It was not long before she lapsed into unconsciousness.

The tick of the mantle clock echoed repeatedly against the stillness of the room; as if to count the heartbeats of two watchful men who waited soberly by Mary's side. Time seemed unending as they waited expectantly for signs of wakefulness. It was during one of those hoped-for, but somehow unexpected, moments in time, that Jed nudged Amos and whispered: *"Look, Amos!"* Mary's eyelids began to flutter, then opened wide, and slowly searched the dim confines of the room. Her eyes, at first bewildered, smiled with love as they lit upon her Father's face. It was only then that the interminable silence was broken. In a hoarse whisper filled with unspoken gratitude she murmured comfortably: *"Papa, the worms has stopped movin'. They's stopped movin', Papa!"*

"You did it, Amos, you did it! Jed exulted. "I just knew that you was the man I've been watchin' for". Amos looked at him querulously as Jed continued: "You see, a few days back, two young boys came by. Missionaries for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints they called themselves. Nice boys. Clean cut, pleasant to be with. And they offered to help. They said that they had the priesthood of God, and that the priesthood had a way of curin' those that was sick. Well, we was willing to try anything to save our little girl; and as they prayed over Mary, I remember these words real plain. The boy said this:

"The time will come -- we don't know when -- but a lone stranger will stop outside your café and he will know how to cure your daughter. We promise you that she will live because of the ministrations of that man."

"Well, I'm not a member of their Church, or nothin', Amos, but what that boy said felt right. It gave me hope; and so I've been glued to that cafe window for days now." Jed's voice trembled, and turned suddenly tender, as he reached for the roughness of his companion's hand. "You've saved my little lamb, Amos, you've saved my little Mary. I'll never be able to find a way to thank you—and God—enough!"