

April 29, 2012
"I AM - The Good Shepherd"
John 10:11-18

11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. 12 A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don't belong to him and he isn't their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock. 13 The hired hand runs away because he's working only for the money and doesn't really care about the sheep.

14 "I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, 15 just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep. 16 I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd.

17 "The Father loves me because I sacrifice my life so I may take it back again. 18 No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again. For this is what my Father has commanded."

What does a shepherd do? Wait, let me reword that; what would it take to be a really good shepherd? What things might a really good shepherd do to take care of his sheep? What would a really good shepherd need to do, or how would they need to be with their sheep?

Shepherds are watchers and caretakers of the sheep. They protect the animals from danger, locate the missing members of the flock, they guide them to places of food, water, and rest; they know their sheep and they know his voice, they trust and follow him. Psalm 23 gives a description of a good shepherd (this is from the Amplified Version, which gives a closer meaning to the original Hebrew in which it was written:

Psalms 23 AMP

1 THE LORD is my Shepherd [to feed, guide, and shield me], I shall not lack.

2 He makes me lie down in [fresh, tender] green pastures; He leads me beside the still *and* restful waters.

³ He refreshes *and* restores my life (my self); He leads me in the paths of righteousness [uprightness and right standing with Him – not for my earning it, but] for His name's sake.

⁴ Yes, though I walk through the [deep, sunless] valley of the shadow of death, I will fear *or* dread no evil, for You are with me; Your rod [to protect] and Your staff [to guide], they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my [brimming] cup runs over.

⁶ Surely *or* only goodness, mercy, *and* unfailing love shall follow me all the days of my life, and through the length of my days the house of the Lord [and His presence] shall be my dwelling place.

Who is your shepherd? David says, “The Lord is my Shepherd.” The lot in life of any particular sheep depended on the type of person who owned it. Some owners are kind, gentle, brave, selfless in their devotion to the flock. Under other owners sheep are abused, starved, used and suffer.

There were several articles in the newspaper this week about the need for more and stronger animal anti-cruelty laws in the hope of cutting down on animal abuse. Berger King this week announced that they will not use caged animals for the food in their restaurants.

Many of you are pet owners. Think of how you care for your pet. You care for its needs and show it love; you feed it, take it to the vet when it's sick, and search for it when it gets out of the yard and runs away.

There are good owners and bad owners of pets, just as there are good shepherds and bad. We know about abused animals. Some owners don't give the best care, they only care about making money from the animal. For example, you've heard of kennels where animals are mistreated, you may have even seen these weak, thin, diseased, animals riddled with fleas and parasites.

You've heard of dog fights; dogs raised and trained to fight, sometimes to the death. They are raised for the money the owner can make, who charge admission to watch the fights, it's for entertainment and gambling.

Owners of these dogs will use bait dogs, or other animals to train their fighting dogs. They will duct tape the mouth of the bait animal and file the nails on its paws so as not to hurt the dog they are training. Many of these bait animals are killed during these training procedures. These bait animals are obtained in many ways, some are stolen, or obtained through an ad falsely claiming that they will give your animal a loving and safe home; or these awful owners will take in strays just to use them and abuse them.

There are bad shepherds who should never have been shepherds. If their sheep could talk they'd say, "Oh how I wish I could be free of this awful owner." I know people like that, people who don't know what it's like to belong to "The Good Shepherd". They have been stolen, they have been lied to about good care and love, they have been used and abused by those who should have loved them, they have suffered under sin and Satan. And the saddest thing is they reject Christ, they think to come under His ownership is to come under the authority of a tyrant. They don't know the character of Jesus. Please tell them about Jesus; please show them Jesus. Shepherds are representations of Jesus Christ and the ways in which He takes care of us. How have you found Jesus to be the true shepherd in your life? What ways has he guided or protected you? Please share that with others.

I want to look at three things this morning:

1. The Sacrifice of the Shepherd

Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd." Then He gives His definition or what that means. He sums it up like this, "The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep (10:11)." He is the sacrificial shepherd, who protects His sheep even at the cost of his own life. This is in contrast to the "hired hand" who, because of his self-centered behavior, abandons the responsibility to protect the sheep at the first sign of trouble. Jesus gave His life for His sheep, and if He was willing to give Himself for us while we were still sinners how much more is the "good shepherd" the reality of the unwavering love and care of our Lord to the flock. This is good news to those in despair and a powerful word of hope to all. In days of hardship this passage is a strong reminder that "If God is for us, who can be against us" (Romans 8:31).

John Beukema relates the story of his father, Dr. Jack Beukema, who had a diamond which was a treasured possession. It had been passed on to him forty years earlier in the form of an engagement ring given to him by his grandfather upon the death of his grandmother. Dr. Beukema had a jeweler reset the diamond into a man's ring. He wore the ring, with his grandmother's diamond, for nearly 20 years. While the diamond was not of the highest quality and of modest size, the value was priceless as a family heirloom.

One night, while attending a conference in another city, John's father went for a walk and was held up at gunpoint by two robbers. They asked for his money, and he gave them all he had. They asked for his watch, which he also promptly handed over. Finally, they asked for his ring, and Dr. Beukema said, "You'll have to come and get it." It wasn't the monetary value of the ring, but the personal significance of it that motivated him to risk his own life to keep it. From my distant perspective, it certainly seems to be an unwise

choice considering the consequences. However, it does lead me to wonder what it is that I possess which I value more than my own life. The pressure on Jesus to abandon the journey to the cross to save Himself would intensify, but our Lord would not and will not abandon his sheep. We are his treasured possession.

2. The Mission of the Shepherd

Verse 16 reminds us of the mission Jesus modeled of welcoming all and seeking all: “I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also.” That’s us! Jesus gave His life once and for all. He gave His life for the World. Remember the night He met with Nicodemus and told him, (John 3:16)

"For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."

His mission is clear: redemption is available to all regardless of age, gender, education, nationality and most importantly, sins of the past. “I have other sheep ...that are not in this sheepfold.” And He has passed on to us the mission of telling others about Him. And oh that God’s family would remove any barriers to offer this good news to all! Easter is not only a time to reflect on what Christ has done for us, but a reminder of our mission, both across the street and around the world. “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him” (John 3:17).

3. The Authority of the Shepherd

The context (John 9-10) of Jesus identifying Himself as “The Good shepherd” involves the Pharisees interrogating a blind man healed by Jesus. And their questions center not so much on the miracle itself but in challenging the authority of Jesus. It is a point of no return for Jesus from that moment on. The Pharisees curse the man given his sight by Jesus and look what they say... (John 9:28-29)

Then they cursed him and said, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses! We know God spoke to Moses, but we don't even know where this man comes from."

They dismissed Jesus as not being a disciple of Moses, which was a very serious charge against a rabbi. They were sure that Jesus’ credibility would be destroyed by this declaration. Jesus’ answer in chapter 10 to their charge against Him is, “I am the good shepherd.”

Jesus also makes it clear that the cross before Him should not be understood as punishment coming as the result of any disobedience as perceived by the religious rulers, but because of his willing and intentional choice to lay down his life (John 10:18).

"No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again. For this is what my Father has commanded."

All of this, Jesus states, is God's plan to redeem the world: it is "...what my has commanded" (John 10:18c). The appointment with the cross was not a last minute strategy, nor was it forced on him. It was and is the heart of the gospel. Since Christ's mission must be ours as His church, the authority and mission we have as His disciples living on this side of Easter and Pentecost comes to us from the Father.

The church is being reminded of the authority of Jesus and the necessity of following Him in His mission. The church is being reminded to tell others that there is a Good Shepherd Who has not only given His life to save them, but will meet them right where they are on purpose and for a purpose. A Good Shepherd Who will ...

That's Jesus the Good Shepherd perhaps the one you need to hear about today because you need rest, peace, renewed strength, guidance along the right path, you need His presence because you are going through a dark valley, you need protection and comfort, you need His blessing, goodness, unfailing love, and you need hope. But remember those who don't know this Good Shepherd who has given His life for them. Share the message of the sacrificial Shepherd, share in the mission of the Shepherd, because you have chosen to live under the authority of the Shepherd.