

The Fourth Sunday of Easter

May 3rd, 2020

This is Good Shepherd Sunday. We will see how Jesus is not only our Shepherd, but our Good Shepherd.

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY:

O Lord Jesus Christ, you are the Good Shepherd who laid down your life for the sheep. Lead us now to the still waters of your life-giving Word that we may abide in your Father's house forevermore; for you live and reign with him and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

OLD TESTAMENT: 1 Samuel 17:34-37 *David, who was himself once a shepherd, tells us one thing shepherds do: they fight to the death for their sheep.*

But David said to Saul, "Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine."

Saul said to David, "Go, and the LORD be with you."

EPISTLE READING: 1 Peter 2:19-25 *Jesus Christ as our Shepherd fought to the death for us, only the death was his own by which he bought us back and makes us his own.*

For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

"He committed no sin,

and no deceit was found in his mouth."

When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

VERSE OF THE DAY: Alleluia. Alleluia. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia. I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me. Alleluia. (John 10:14)

Sermon: John 10:1-10

What Sheep Mean to the Shepherd, and What a Shepherd Means to the Sheep.

"I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." Jesus used

this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them.

Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Some things go together well. Take Richard Petty, for example, one of the best NASCAR drivers ever. Match him up with a Dodge Charger, one of the best cars in its day. Richard Petty racked up over 700 top ten finishes and 200 wins, many of them in a Dodge Charger. Those two go well together. Or take Andy Griffith and Barney Fife from the Andy Griffith Show. You have Barney who is very nervous and often gets into trouble and team him up with Andy who is very calm and level headed and who gets Barney out of trouble every time. That is a good match.

One more perfect match is a shepherd and his sheep. Sheep are useful for wool and food, but they absolutely need someone to take care of them. Now, match the sheep up with a shepherd. A shepherd isn't a 9-5 kind of guy who watches over the sheep because he is paid to. No. A shepherd must care for his sheep and be willing to do anything for them. In our Old Testament reading David was a shepherd and he fought lions and bears to protect his sheep. Normally a human life is more important than that of a dumb animal. We instructed our kids not to risk their lives and swerve the car into a tree or ditch to avoid running over a rabbit. But the shepherd would disagree. He cares so much for his sheep he will risk his life for them. So a helpless sheep and a shepherd make a good match.

What is your relationship with your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ? Your relationship with him is like that of sheep to their shepherd. Sounds good, but this means you have to swallow your pride. This means you utterly need and depend on Jesus for everything. That is hard for us to admit. We don't want to be totally dependent on Jesus. But as Jesus explains, we quickly realize what a perfect match it is, Jesus the Shepherd and we his sheep. First, let's see how much the sheep mean to the shepherd.

I. How much sheep mean to the shepherd.

I am the last person to tell you about sheep. I am a suburban guy raised by a newspaperman and a secretary. I barely know one end of a sheep from another. But we have someone who knows everything about sheep, Jesus. He not only created them as God, he also lived in a society where sheep were extremely important. So let him explain to us what we need to know about sheep.

"I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice."

Did you know they had truck stops in Jesus' day? Well, they were not actually for trucks. They were for sheep. When a shepherd leads his flock to the city, he has a problem. Where does he park his sheep? They would build these massive sheep pens that could hold the flocks of many shepherds. These were designed to be secure places for the sheep. They had only one gate and there was a gatekeeper or security guard at that gate every minute of the day. The only ones admitted into the pen were the shepherds. No stranger was allowed in. So the sheep are kept safe.

Now that may sound a bit chaotic to us. I mean, you have dozens if not hundreds of sheep from a dozen different flocks all intermingled there. How could anyone know which sheep belonged to which shepherd? Easy. All the shepherd had to do was start talking. His sheep would recognize his voice and come to him. The sheep who didn't recognize his voice would back away from him because he is a total stranger. We have visions of the old cattle drives in the 1800's and of cowboys standing guard over their herds. Often those cowboys would sing and talk to the cows to keep them calm. Shepherds did the same

thing. They constantly talked to their sheep. They gave them names. They can tell one sheep from another. This is important. Sheep don't have much going for them. They have no sharp teeth or claws to fight. They are nearly blind. But they are good at one thing: trust. Sheep trust their shepherds.

So the shepherd makes sure his sheep are secure. He also makes sure he gives them everything they need. The shepherd would patiently lead them to pasture to eat, to streams to drink, to shade when it is hot, and back to the pen for the night. Again shepherds are perfect for sheep.

This is how much sheep mean to their shepherds. And this is how much you mean to Jesus. He knows you by name. I know names of members, but there are times when I struggle remembering a name or who had surgery two weeks ago. Not Jesus. He knows your name and everything about you, even your deepest fears. He knows the number of hairs on your head at any given moment. He protects you and makes sure you are safe and secure. ***"No one can snatch them out of my hand,"*** he will say later in this chapter. And he will give us everything we need. He leads us to green pastures. He will even lead us through the valley of the shadow of death. But it will be "through" it safely to the other side. Jesus is your self-sacrificing shepherd who will battle all to protect you. He even laid down his life for you.

II. What does the shepherd mean to the sheep.

That is what sheep mean to the shepherd. Now, what does the shepherd mean to the sheep? ***"Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them. Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."***

The people had trouble following Jesus with his shepherd/sheep illustration. You see, he was trying to show them that he is their Shepherd and no one else. Read through chapter 9 of John. Jesus healed a young man who was blind. When the Pharisees heard about it, they called him in for questioning. A third degree interrogation describes it better. They found out it was Jesus who healed him. Then something amazing happened. Some people were beginning to think that Jesus was special. Even the man who was healed confessed that Jesus is special. So they excommunicated him. These were the thieves and robbers Jesus referred to. The Pharisees thought they were the shepherds. They thought people came to God through them. They were trying to steal God's sheep by preventing people from flocking to Jesus.

So Jesus was using this parable to tell people he is their Shepherd, not them, but he had to simplify it a bit. We know they had large, community sheep pens in the city where shepherds can keep their flocks safe. But what about in the country? They had smaller sheep pens, too. They had fences to protect the sheep and an entrance, but they did not have a gate, nor did they have a guard. So, a shepherd would lead his flock into this pen and he would become the gate. He would stand or lay or sleep in the entrance so that nothing can get in or out without going through him.

Do you see what Jesus is saying here? He is the gate. Through him alone will anyone come to God and to heaven. At first that sounds rather arrogant. People think there are many ways to God. All religions are equal, they would say. How dare we say it is Jesus alone? But Jesus isn't arrogant here. Rather, he is telling a world that is completely shut out from God because of sin that now there is a way to God—through him! He is doing us a big favor here.

He is that gate because he is our Good Shepherd. You heard David talk about how a good shepherd risks life and limb and fights off lions and bears to protect his flock. Jesus does that, too. He not only is willing to risk his life for us, he actually gave it up for us. You heard it in our epistle reading, how Jesus let men seize him and crucify. What does that mean to us? As it says in that reading, ***"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."*** We are saved because he bore our sins and his wounds, his death, wipes away the guilt of our sins. That is what Jesus means to us. He is the gate. He is the reason we are saved.

Knowing God has made an entrance to heaven through Christ, who would want to try going to God another way? Well, there are plenty of people out there who try. Jesus warns about robbers and thieves. They don't care about the sheep. Instead, they want to hurt the sheep and try to steal them away from God and Jesus. That is why this parable is so important in our lives. Watch out for the thieves and robbers.

But how can we recognize them? Jesus tells us how: his voice, his Word. There are so many voices out there speaking to us, calling us to follow them. They are eager to tell us how to approach life, live it, who to love most, and so on. But there is another voice. Jesus speaks to us through his Word. The world tells us how to have life. Jesus tells us how to have a full life. He tells who he is, who we are, what he did for us and what it means, how that affects our view on money, relationships, everything. All you have to do is recognize his voice and back away from strangers. Simple.

But do we? The other voices sound appealing because they dangle before us worldly fun and pleasure. Eve heard two people speaking to her in the garden, God who said don't eat, and the devil who said eat. She listened to one. How did that turn out for her and us?

Sheep can't do much for themselves, but they are good at one thing: trusting the shepherd. Do the same. This means knowing the voice of Jesus as you listen to his Word. This means recognizing the voice of strangers and back away from them. This means trusting Jesus even when he leads you through dangerous times. Trust him. Run from the strangers and run to your Shepherd. Amen.