

Sermon: My Shepherd

Scripture: Psalm 23, John 10:11-18

April 25, 2021

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Today's first Scripture is the famous Psalm 23. This wonderful psalm of David has served him well during his time when David was in peril surrounded by his enemies. Since then, many saints of God also benefited and leaned on David's poem while facing their challenging moments. Trusting our God's mercies are new every morning, let us open our hearts to hear how God is meeting all our needs today.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. God makes me lie down in green pastures; and leads me beside still waters; God restores my soul. God leads me in right paths for God's name sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long. Amen.

Our second reading comes from the Gospel of John. Throughout the John's Gospel, Jesus shares seven "I am" statements where he uses metaphors to help us understand who he is in our lives. Chapter 10 is an important chapter as it contains two of the seven. The first is the "I am the door or gate," and the second, "I am the good shepherd." On this Good Shepherd Sunday, let us listen to Jesus as he describes the characters of the good shepherd with us this morning in John 10:11-18. Hear now the Word of the Lord.

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father."

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

O Lord, the good shepherd of your people, grant us your Spirit this morning with open hearts that when we hear your voice, we may know it is you who is calling us each by name. Strengthen us through your Word that we may have the courage to follow your lead. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be pleasing to you, our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.

We are continuing our Eastertide journey, exploring what Jesus has done during his 40 days after the resurrection until his ascension. Every year on the fourth Sunday of Easter, we end up looking at this same text, Good Shepherd passage. The text itself does not take place after Jesus' death, so why is it important for us to look at this passage? It is because his death on the cross was the fulfillment of how he describes as a "Good Shepherd." Did you hear and recognize important phrase that is repeated multiple times in today's John passage? Jesus says, ***I lay down my life*** for his sheep, that he has the power to lay down his life on his own accord, and he has the power to take it up again. All of these, he does as he prophesied before his death.

During the times of his ministry on earth, Jesus defended and outwitted the attacks of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and the chief priests from attacking and harming the thousands of flock that were following him to hear his sermons and teachings. Many of these disciples were not named but they were following Jesus and his twelve disciples as they traveled. To eradicate the followers of Christ, Pharisees, Sadducees, and the chief priests attacked, plotted, and killed Jesus on the cross in order to scatter the flock like the wolves. Then it would be easy target for them to hunt God's sheep down when they are alone, hurt, bruised, and on the run, away from the safety of large numbers.

It is evident that after the death of Jesus on the cross, that is exactly what took place. We heard the sermons about them for last few weeks: The women who loved Jesus were by themselves wanting to mourn for him, some like Thomas – the twelfth disciple – took off away from Jerusalem and their leaders for safe haven beyond the land of Emmaus, others hid behind the locked door in fear, and some denied their vows like Peter. Powers that may wanted to destroy the God's flock seemed to have everything in control. But Jesus, our Lord and Savior, is not a hireling. He is a good, faithful, steadfast shepherd. He rose from the grave, appeared to each group and lost sheep, and revealed himself to demonstrate that there is truly nothing on earth nor in heaven that can separate the love he has for those who love him. Jesus called them once again by their name, forgave their doubts and insecurities, and gathered them as one flock. As they assembled, strength grew as their numbers also grew. They utilized each other's talents, and Jesus further equipped and empowered them with the Holy Spirit to carry the good news to the ends of the earth.

As we physically gather back as one flock at Westminster after one year since the pandemic, we noticed many of our vulnerabilities being apart. There is something spiritual about being together, and the feeling of joy when sharing our gifts and talents in worship and ministry together should not be taken for granted. One of the things that I am thankful for others as well as a gift that I lack is a singing voice. Don't get me wrong, I can carry a tune, but I cannot *sing* like our weekly Hymn singer, Lyle, and many folks who sang solos and in ensembles to bless us during worship. We really appreciate you all sharing your gifts with us. I always wanted to sing well, but I never could. When I was younger, I wanted to sing and live like the song *My Way*, popularized by singers like Frank Sinatra and Elvis Presley. These two music icons had a great voice, commanding personality, charisma, and they had an aura about them. And as the song states, I wanted to live my life so that when my end is near and I face the final curtain, I can say I had charted my course, took the blows that the life had thrown at me; yet strong enough to not yield nor kneel, but most importantly that I did it all my way. What is there not to like about it? Well, since then, I matured a bit, I still like the song and would like to sing it well one day, but I realized that this song that I adored since when I was young is the antithesis to how Jesus lived and how our lives should reflect. Rather than living my way, we should aim to live God's way.

Many of us are in a leadership role: with a title in your vocation; or as a parent, grandparents, some blessed to witness great-grandchildren. All of us are trying to lead our own lives by doing our best to maintain and control the circumstances in our lives. Rather than doing it "My Way," rather than having the burden of figuring out the things that are out of our control, why don't we try the "Shepherd's Way?" Did you know that one of the most recent pew research asked what they would like to have more in the church and the majority of the answer was silence? Sometimes it is best to let the Spirit of the Lord take the lead and be a sheep. Many times in our lives, things get out of hand and we place our troubles in God's hands anyway. More importantly the things that are most important to our lives – our lives, our children's lives, our relationships, our time on earth, whom we influence, and how we are impacted by the worldly scenarios and situations, they are not ours to control anyway.

In his book, *God is More than Enough*, renown Pastor Tony Evans shares this story. A man on a trip in the African rainforest was following a guide. As they pushed onward into deeper and darker jungle, the guide with his machete was whacking away at the thick green growth that rose like a wall everywhere before them. "How do you know where to go?" the man asked. "Where's the path?" The guide replied, "I am the path."

It is important to choose a rightful leader as the followers. Our gospel reading tells us that there are many types of shepherds: verse 12 tells us about a hireling who runs away

at a sight of trouble; verse 16 tells us there are other shepherds who lose their sheep that Jesus found on his way and adds to his flock; and we all know that there is a good, faithful, steadfast, trustworthy, almighty, death-defying shepherd who will make you lie down in green pastures; and leads you beside still waters. This shepherd will restore your soul.

You know how David called this shepherd? The Lord is **MY** shepherd, I shall not want. Out of the three types and choices for your leader, your shepherd, who will make the path, David is exalted in the sight of the Lord because he made a personal choice – even through his grave mistakes, through thick and thin, through many trying times – he made an everlasting bond and a vow to listen to one voice that calls his name and follow him only: Jesus, name above all names. As a king, who yields an ultimate power and authority over every person and things in his kingdom yet laid it down on his own accord to become God's sheep and be included in God's flock.

As we continue in our spiritual journey and even finding ourselves walking through the darkest valley, let us be very sheepish and lean on **MY** and **OUR** shepherd for guidance, provisions, and most importantly his everlasting love to protect us on our way to greener pastures where we will find joy and peace. Amen.