

The Good Shepherd

King of Glory Lutheran Church

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Year B: Easter 4: John 10:11-18

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²The 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. ¹³The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. ¹⁴I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶I 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. ¹⁷For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸No 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."

Jesus is our Good Shepherd, our comforter, our guide, our ever-present protector, our friend, our love, our final home. This is Good News!

On this 4th weekend after Easter, we move from sightings of the resurrected Jesus to Jesus as the Good Shepherd. We learn again the 'why' of Jesus' death. What does Jesus' death have to do with our daily lives?

You all know that my first congregations were in South Dakota: one in the capitol of Pierre. That large church took care of a tiny rural church 35 minutes to the east. This was farming country, animal country. A woman in the rural church raised sheep. She knew each one's personality. She kept them fed on good prairie grasses, was up nights during lambing season, then yawning through church. My colleague always teased her about how dumb sheep are. I'll never forget her – her sun-weathered face and strong hands – she gave the jabs right back. "They might be stupid, but then why would Jesus call Himself a Good Shepherd?" she would say.

There is a reason...many reasons that one image of God, in our scriptures, is a shepherd. We as urban people might not understand the analogy quite as well as rural folks. Doesn't mean it is untrue.

Let's say Psalm 23 again.

¹The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

²He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;

³he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

⁴Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me.

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

⁶Surely 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.

Many older churches today that still have images of Jesus carrying a lamb in their worship space. He is cradling one in His arms, or the lamb is over His strong shoulders. “I am the Good Shepherd,” Jesus says.

The context of our lesson for today is this. Jesus has just healed a blind man in Chapter 9. The religious authorities are upset again with Jesus healing and acting as a rabbi. But the upshot for the previously blind man is that now, he belongs. He belongs to the flock. He is a sheep that Jesus has taken care of and now has a community. With an condition like blindness, the man would have been an outcast. Now he belongs. Now he is a sheep of God’s fold.

Do we know we are sheep? I’m not saying you’re stupid! Just asking, do we know we are sheep? Jesus cares for us. Jesus watches over us. Jesus feeds our hungry souls. Jesus is with us.

In the 23rd Psalm, James Limburg, Old Testament professor notes, that in the original Hebrew poetry, there are 26 words before and after the phrase, ‘thou art with me.’ Twenty-six before and twenty-six after. It is as if poetically and theologically, the Hebrews believes that God is in the very middle of us, at the center of all our lives. We cannot escape that God is with us. (James Limburg, *Psalms* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2000)).

If we trust that God is with us, in the very middle of our daily lives, then it is logical that we lack nothing. We have what we need.

Then why this constant longing? We want a new iPhone, a better and shinier vehicle, more money in the bank account, more, better, the newest. We want and so we think we need. It’s the hunger that we were taught just by living in a consumer culture.

The only thing we truly lack is more intimacy with God. If we were to come to our death bed, not knowing God, peering over into the unknown next, we might just want and think we need God. We need God. As a savior. A faith friend. A

counselor. A disciplinarian when we wander away. A lover of our souls. We don't have to be in want...in any way.

God provides our daily needs, food and water, places to rest. And with Jesus gone from the earth, God provides those things through our hands to others so they have what they need. But God doesn't stop the hard times from coming either. We've all walked through those valleys and ravines in life when it's challenging to know where to turn. Yet...yet...the Shepherd's rod and staff are still there to guide and even rescue. Even in the face of our enemies.

So what then? The Good Shepherd will lead us home. He died to lead us home.

What is the best feeling of home you hold in your heart or can imagine? (repeat)

Grandma's kitchen table where there were no limits on dinner servings or cookies? Dad's lap for a bedtime story? Summer camp where God became real? A hot shower and good bed after a tough basketball practice? A bedroom with the prettiest bedspread and matching curtains. A spouse whose love is unconditional. Home is love provided in many ways.

If you had a rough home growing up, trust that living in the house of the Lord forever will be quite different. This Shepherd won't betray, or wound, or abandon. This Shepherd protects.

Don't we all long to go home? We long, even yearn to go to that place of best comfort. A space of peace without trouble. Our hearts know what it will feel like, or already feels like.

Jesus our Good Shepherd currently provides that loving space for us. Like the blind man, our wounds are healed in His presence. He leads us to comforting places and back to the flock for community.

Take a moment and reflect on what the Good Shepherd needs you to hear today. God is in the middle of your life.

You lack nothing because God chooses a relationship with you.

God gives your heart the home you need.

Amen.