

Our Shepherd Cares

4th Sun. of Easter – 04/21/24 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: John 10:11-18 Pastor Keith Besel

vv. 14-15, [Jesus said,] **“I am the Good Shepherd. I know My own and My own know Me...; and I lay down My life for the sheep.”**

Introduction

✘ Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

✘ This morning, every one of you will “hear” everything that is said, read, and sung in this service. Now let’s get real: even though everyone will “hear” everything here, the reality is that not every one of you will listen to everything that is said, read, and sung in this service.

→ You see, listening is much more involved; it takes effort; it requires a true desire to engage with what’s going on. We “hear” things all the time, but we actually only listen to a very small portion of all that we hear.

→ Today, with all our current technology and social media, there is an even greater amount of voices and messages bombarding us. And to be honest, for most of us, it’s just plain overwhelming for us to try and know what “voice” or “voices” we should listen to.

✘ But still, none of us can just give up in despair or frustration. No, as God’s redeemed and beloved children in Christ, it is crucial that we take seriously the sheer quantity of voices bombarding our eardrums and eyeballs each day so that we might be able to faithfully discern who and what gets our true attention?

→ So, it stands to reason that we ought to listen to those who actually care about us, right? But...do we always recognize who that is.

→ Whatever, and whoever it is that is the source of those voices coming at you each day, almost all of them want you to believe that they care about you; that their first priority is what you need. That’s why almost every voice on the radio, podcasts, TV or whatever your favorite social media platform might be, begins by trying to connect to some problem; some need that you have or feel. Then they try to make you believe that they have the answer; the solution to your problem or issue. All you need to do is get their product, or tap into their program, or become a part of their group, or join their movement – then your future will be so much better!

→ But here’s the problem: Do those people or companies or advocacy groups really, truly care about you? Who really loves me and actually wants what’s best for me? Most of them only want you so that they can get your money, or they can advance their agenda. I’m sorry to say it, but you and I are very often only a pawn to help them get what they want.

✘ So, how do we know who actually cares? Our Scripture Reading today, on this Good Shepherd Sunday, speaks directly to this. It teaches us that Jesus; He is the Shepherd who cares deeply for you; whose love for you and me is unlike any and all others in this world.

I. Jesus is unlike all other shepherds

✘ The people in Jesus’ day had heard a lot from spiritual leaders. Those voices had spanned many generations; voices from long ago like Moses and the prophets. Those were faithful, caring voices that proclaimed and recorded God’s loving words in the sacred Scriptures.

→ But in more recent years – actually for the last four centuries at the time of our text, the prophets had been silent. And the ones they now had; who were supposed to be teaching and interpreting God’s Word in Scripture for them had become less than faithful. The Pharisees and the chief priests, mostly Sadducees, were not concerned about what was best for the needs of

God's people, but instead they were now self-serving shepherds; protecting their own places of honor and influence.

- ✘ Then Jesus came along, and His voice was different. It was the voice of someone who cared – really, truly, lovingly cared. Jesus said of His Gentile sheep – that's you and me in verse 16, "They will listen to My voice."

→ And how would they know that He cares for them and their needs? Because Jesus not only used His voice as God's Word, but as John says in verse 16 of our Epistle, Jesus' love for us was put into action, "He laid down His life for us...". The original Greek in both our Gospel and Epistle Readings is much more precise than our English translations. It uses the Greek word, *hypêr* (ὑπὲρ) that specifies that Jesus laid down His life not just "for" us, but "on behalf of" us; "for the sake of" us; "instead of" us!

- ✘ So when Jesus says that He is the "good shepherd" (v. 11), He's highlighting a contrast. "Good" can also be translated as "noble" or "excellent." The job of shepherd was not an easy one. It was tiring and hazardous. And Jesus is directly comparing His job of shepherding with those bad shepherds, like the Pharisees and Sadducees. They are what He calls in verse 12 the "hired hand(s)." They're the ones who have little or no concern and commitment toward the sheep. When danger came, like the Roman occupiers, they didn't care about God's flock but only about their own self-preservation; their own self-interests.

→ The good shepherd though, He owns the sheep. He's committed – heart, mind and soul to them. Unlike those bad shepherds, Jesus cares for His sheep and He will do anything; whatever is necessary to protect them.

II. Jesus cares enough to lay down His life

- ✘ As I mentioned earlier, Jesus says, as the Good Shepherd in verse 11 that He "lays down His life for the sheep." This is what sets Jesus apart from all other shepherds. Most shepherds will try to protect their sheep, but they draw the line at dying for their sheep.

→ But Jesus – He cares so much that He is willing to come between His sheep and any and all danger. The hired hand won't risk his life for some dumb, misbehaving and wandering sheep. No, He disappears – trying to save his own skin. But Jesus – He's willing to die "on behalf of" and "in the place of" His sin-filled, yet fully redeemed sheep.

- ✘ Why would He do such a thing; something totally against what makes sense to our worldly way of thinking? Well, there is Jesus' obligation to act according to God's all-knowing will.

→ But even more, this Good Shepherd, Jesus has a deep and profound commitment to His sheep; the ones whom He loves more than Himself. You might remember a different image from Paul in Ephesians 5:25 where he says that "Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her." That is, He surrendered His very life, for His beloved Bride!

→ This is an important point because it shows that Jesus was not a victim on that cross. He wasn't forced to endure that suffering and shame. No, in verse 18 He clarifies the point, saying, "No one takes [My life] from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord." Jesus offered Himself as the sacrifice and He also took back His life in the resurrection: "I lay down My life that I may take it up again" (v. 17b). That's the totality of God's plan for His sheep, Jesus' sacrificial death in the place of His sheep and His resurrection in victory over death – again, on behalf of His sheep!

III. Jesus cares with acts of kindness

- ✘ Jesus chose the term "shepherd" to identify Himself. But remember, shepherd was the term used to describe those other people tending to God's flock as well. At its core, the term simply describes those who have spiritual oversight.

- In our First Reading from Acts, chapter 4, we see the contrast between those other shepherds – the Jewish authorities, and those who serve as under-shepherds to the Good Shepherd. It's there that we see Christ's apostles, Peter and John under arrest; standing before the Jewish Council. Their crime? Well, they healed a lame man and then preached to the crowds that Jesus, the resurrected Christ is the one who made it happen.
- Because these Jewish leaders were the same guys that crucified Jesus, Acts 4:2 says that Peter's message "greatly annoyed" them. They were jealous because the people were listening to Christ's preachers. They were upset because Peter and John were claiming that Jesus, whom they tried to kill, was alive! Can you imagine going to all the trouble of crucifying someone, only to hear His followers show up in your "preaching spot" and tell everyone that your crucifixion didn't stick?
- ⊗ But Peter is quick to point out the irony in this when he asks the "rulers of the people and elders," in effect, "Are you upset with us because of a 'good deed' that we did to a crippled man?" Peter is calling these men to task: "What kind of leaders find fault with an act of kindness? Is that the kind of shepherds you are?"
 - And make no mistake, Peter knew that the Shepherd whom he served, cared for His sheep with acts of kindness as good as and even greater than the healing he had seen.
 - So Peter declared in Acts 4:10, It is "by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead – by Him this man is standing before you well." Yes, Jesus was of course the One behind that loving, healing, caring, kind action. For He is the foundation of faith; He is the way to eternity in heaven; He is source and the cause and the sustainer of our salvation.
- ⊗ This message of the resurrection that Peter proclaimed – it transforms lives...radically...for good! That's why we make such a big deal about it; why we proclaim it still today far and wide; because when the truth of Christ's victory over death is not just "heard", but is actually internalized into a person's life, then he/she becomes an entirely new creation.
 - It begins with saving faith in Christ. But then it grows and matures into sincere love and care for others, as we show Jesus' love to those around us when we treat them in love; when we care for their needs; when we are kind to them in the name of the Good Shepherd.

IV. Jesus cares for you!

- ⊗ And it is all about the Good Shepherd, from beginning to end, because He never closes His heart to His sheep. He is in fact, the One in whom God's saving words and promises of extreme and perfect love actually became love in the flesh. Jesus is how God reached out to touch us; to care for us; to help us and save us!
 - Jesus broke through all of the chatter; all of the self-serving earthly noise and He became God's "Word in the flesh"; God Himself living; "dwelling with us" (Jn. 1:14).
- ⊗ And even today, after He has physically taken up His throne in heaven, Jesus still lives among us here through His Spirit; still cares physically for us here in His body of Christian believers; in the "one holy Christian Church."
 - In verses 14-15 Jesus promises, "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." There is no more intimate relationship than that of the Father, and Jesus His Son. Yet Jesus tells us that in the same beautiful and profound way that He and the Father know each other, as our Shepherd He knows us and our needs; every single thing that is truly important to you...and to me.

- This is how David was able to say literally in Psalm 23:1, “Yahweh is my shepherd; I lack nothing.” Now Jesus; when He says, “I am” He makes it clear that yes, He is Yahweh.
- ✘ You and I have the same Shepherd as King David. “Jesus” which means “Yahweh saves” – He is “my shepherd”; “your shepherd” too. And so we trust Him with every ounce of our being to lead, guide, renew, and restore our lives and spirits. Even when we face that final, great enemy – death, we know with certainty that He is with us. His perfect Words; His all-powerful actions, they comfort us. And just as He promised, He is with us all the days of our life; protecting and leading us home to Paradise.

Conclusion

- ✘ So, what does God want you to hear from Him today? Two words: two words that are deeply profound and life-changing: “for you.”
- Your loving and caring Good Shepherd speaks those two words personally to you as He comes to you here in His Divine Service: in the Words of Absolution; in the words of today’s Scripture Readings; in this message right now; and in a moment as He serves you His true body and blood in and with ordinary bread and wine.
- Yes, it’s here among His ordinary sheep that Jesus speaks and acts on your behalf; giving out His extraordinary love and care. Do you simply “hear” Him, or are you listening to Him? Are you seeing it with the eyes of your faith? Right now Jesus gives Himself, personally, and it is all, “for you!”
- ✘ The One who goes with you today and with you into this week; your Shepherd – He cares. He has given His all...for you!
- Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia! Amen.*