

In Nomine Jesu

Psalm 23

Ezekiel 34:11-16

1 Peter 2:21-25

John 10:11-16

Jesus, The *Good* Shepherd

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

As many of you are undoubtedly aware, or have figured out, today is the day that is often called Good Shepherd Sunday. Today God focuses us on what it means that our Lord and Savior is also our Shepherd. You heard our Psalm for today, Psalm 23, which is likely the most famous of all the Psalms. As we are hearing our texts for today though we must be careful to not allow the emotions that often come into play with Jesus' role as the Good Shepherd cloud your hearing.

Make no mistake, today is an emotional day in the church year. Many of us have been brought through the valley of the shadow of death. There can be emotion appropriately attached to those memories and experiences. But as we look at our text for today, wherein Jesus proclaims Himself to be the Good

Shepherd, let us try to look past the typical stereotype of Jesus as the Good Shepherd.

You have probably heard Pastor refer to how the world is trying to turn Jesus into an effeminate man who wouldn't hurt a fly. This is also how Jesus as the Good Shepherd is sometimes portrayed in congregations. I would encourage you to hear what it really means that Jesus is our Good Shepherd. Our text begins:

***I AM the Good Shepherd, the Good Shepherd His life lays down on behalf of the sheep.*¹**

The first words of our pericope, our section of scripture, for today are the Name of God. That means that Jesus is saying that He is the God who created the universe. He is the God who saved Noah from flood that He Himself sent. He is the God who parted the Red Sea and then brought it crashing back down on Pharaoh's army. He is the Good Shepherd and is not some puny guy who will sit by and watch as His sheep are murdered.

The Good Shepherd is the Man who, seeing His sheep in danger, without hesitation jumps to their defense. He puts His own life on the line in order to save His sheep's life. You are free to hear this and think of the Cross, because that's

¹ John 10:11

where Jesus did this for you. It was on the Cross that Jesus laid His life down for His sheep, for you. And His efforts were not in vain.

Two weeks ago we heard the eyewitness testimony referring to the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead. Jesus' sacrifice accomplished your Salvation. According to today's text that means that you are now His sheep forever. Now, having heard the main point of this entire text, hear what else Jesus has to say about His being the Good Shepherd.

Also, the hired hand is not a shepherd, he who does not own the sheep sees the wolf coming and he leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf carries it off and they scatter. For he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep.²

Here Jesus declares the difference between being paid to protect something, and protecting something that you own. We all know that most human beings are rather greedy. But we also know that most humans aren't willing to put their lives on the line just to fulfill their greed, after all they want to enjoy their gains.

So when the hired hand sees danger coming that he doesn't think he can handle, you can be fairly certain that he's going to skedaddle out of there as

² John 10:12-13

quickly as he can. The hired hand doesn't really care about the sheep. He cares about getting paid, and he knows that getting paid is a lot more fun when you're alive. Our reading continues.

I am the Good Shepherd, and I know my own, and my own they know me, just as the Father knows me, I also know the Father, and the Life of Me I lay down on behalf of the sheep.³

The Good Shepherd knows you who are His sheep. He knows your weaknesses, He knows your strengths. He knows your hopes and He knows your fears. He knows everything there is to know about you. He knows all of these things about all of His sheep.

The sheep also get to know Him. You get to know about your Good Shepherd through hearing His Voice speaking His Word. Particularly you get to know what He did for you. You get to know that He laid down His life for you.

Here Jesus also reveals that He is not alone. He reveals that there is another who cares just as much about you as He does. The Father who knows Jesus, also knows you. The Father is the one who sent the Good Shepherd to take care of you. Neither He nor the Shepherd will abandon you.

³ John 10:14-15

However, there are more sheep in His flock than just those who are here in this building. There are certainly more than those who heard Jesus the first time he said this. Our reading concludes:

But also there are sheep I have which are not from this fold, and those ones it is necessary for Me to lead and the Voice of Me they will hear. So there will become one flock, one Shepherd.⁴

There are those who ought to be here, but are not. There are those who are still waiting for the Shepherd, who still need to hear His voice. They might not know that's what they are waiting for, but it is. Notice here, that it is the Good Shepherd who is going to be doing the leading and the speaking. Sometimes you get to be the mouth that He uses to speak His voice, but it is still without doubt Him who is doing the leading.

Sadly there are those who have heard His Voice, and yet ignore it. Sometime they even try to actively silence His Voice. But do not be discouraged by these apparent failures. After all, the Good Shepherd is the One in charge, and He knows that some will ignore His Voice, yet still He speaks.

He makes his goal clear. His goal is for there to be one flock, one Shepherd. Notice this though, the verb, or action word, "become," is in the future tense.

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There *will* become one flock, one Shepherd. It is easy to look around and see that at least right now, there is not visibly one flock. There's a whole lot of groups of sheep that are claiming that they are the one flock, and that they have the one Shepherd. There are those claiming that there doesn't have to be only one flock and only one Shepherd.

In response to this I would reply with the words that Jesus himself spoke, "Those ones it is necessary for Me to lead, and the Voice of Me they will hear." Those who are of the one flock are led by Jesus, and follow His voice. That means that you learn about Him from hearing His voice. His voice is the Word. He made that clear to you in His Word.

Others will try to say that they can hear the voice of the Shepherd in other places. They might even try to say that the Word is not truly the voice of the Shepherd. However, it is only in the Word, and the Sacraments which the Word teaches you about, that God has promised to be. He has made no promise to be heard in the voice of your emotions. He has made no promise to be heard in the collective voices of those claiming to follow Him. The only place that God has promised to speak to us is in His Word.

Sometimes you might hear people arguing that the Bible is not the inspired Word of God. Sometimes you might hear them saying that the Bible doesn't really

say what you think it does. Recognize that these are the tactics of wolves. The goal of the wolf is to scatter and isolate the sheep. By trying to get you to doubt the Word, the wolf is trying to separate you from the Shepherd and from the rest of the flock. The wolf will try to get you to feel like you can't trust the other sheep in your flock. The wolf tends to be very good at these things.

It is worth noting, that sometimes we sheep can allow the evil one to turn us into the image of wolves. Such 'crossbreeds' are on the lookout for whatever sheep they think they can manage to snatch. To those who might be changing into the image of wolves, I would remind them that the Sheep have a Good Shepherd. And unlike the hired hands, the Shepherd will stay and fight.

We are not being watched over by a simple hired hand. We are being watched over by the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd has laid down His life for you. He is the One who will go after you when you wander, leaving the other ninety-nine behind with the under-shepherd. The Good Shepherd will not abandon you.

According to Jesus' teaching in the Psalm, the rod and staff that the Shepherd carries are more than just tools. They can also be used as weapons. The Good Shepherd is not some little boy who can't defend Himself. The Good Shepherd is a Guardian who will stop at nothing to protect His Sheep.

That means that your Good Shepherd will not leave you alone. This is true even when you wander off by yourself and make yourself an easy target for the wolf. The Good Shepherd will call after you with His Word. You know this to be true because He has already laid down His life for you, and has been raised from the dead. He will guard you. He will guide you. He has already done this for you all.

One day in the future, there will truly be only one flock. There will be only one Shepherd. When that day comes, by the mercy and love of the Good Shepherd, you will be in that flock following Him.

Now may the peace which passes all understanding, and which comes from the Voice of the Shepherd, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen.

Easter 3
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Vicar Christopher M. Craig
Soli Deo Gloria