

First Trinity Lutheran Church
John 10: 11-31
May 7, 2006

The Good Shepherd

A shepherd was looking after his sheep one day on the side of a deserted road, when suddenly a brand new Porsche screeches to a halt. The driver, a man dressed in an Armani suit, Cerutti shoes, Ray-Ban sunglasses, Rolex wrist-watch, and a Pierre Cardin tie, gets out and asks the shepherd: "If I can tell you how many sheep you have, will you give me one of them?" The shepherd looks at the young man, and then looks at the large flock of grazing sheep and replies: "Okay." The young man parks the car, connects his laptop to his mobile, enters a NASA Web site, scans the ground using his GPS, opens a database with 60 Excel tables filled with logarithms and pivot tables, and then prints out a 150-page report on his high-tech mini-printer. He turns to the shepherd and says, "You have exactly 1,586 sheep here." Rather surprised the shepherd replies, "That's correct, you can have your sheep." The young man takes an animal and puts it in the back of his Porsche. Just as the man is about to drive off, the shepherd asks him: "If I guess your profession, will you return my animal to me?" The young man answers, "Yes, why not?" The shepherd says, "You are an Computer Consultant." "How did you know?" asks the young man. "Very simple," answers the shepherd. "Firstly, you came here without being called. Secondly, you charged me a fee to tell me something I already knew, and Thirdly, you don't understand anything about my business. Now please can I have my dog back?"

As city folks we may not fully appreciate the story of the Good Shepherd because none of us have ever herded sheep. There is one aspect of shepherding sheep that intrigues me and it is something that I did know. When shepherds are tending their flocks at night they herd all their sheep in one common fold. The fold, during the NT times is a wall of stones with one opening. There the shepherds pitch camp together. The sheep all mingle in one fold. This provides the group protection. When morning comes each

shepherd goes to the entrance of the fold. Then one at a time each shepherd calls out to his sheep. All of a sudden sheep begin to head to the gate. But not all the sheep move, just those that know of voice of their own shepherd. And they follow their shepherd to green pastures and still waters.

This is the way that Jesus says it is with us. My sheep hear my voice and they follow me. And when Jesus calls his sheep by name, they listen. Verse 3 says that the sheep hear his voice. Verse 4 says that they know his voice. They do not know the voice of strangers – but they do recognize the voice of their shepherd. Hearing the shepherd’s voice, the sheep follow as he leads. The sheep do not follow the voice of strangers. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers. Are you following the voice of Jesus or are you following the voice of strangers. There are many voices today that are competing with Jesus voice for your attention. How can we alter our priorities so that Jesus’ voice is the one with real authority in our life? In order to follow Jesus we have to be familiar with his voice and to be able to distinguish his voice from that of strangers, and to be able to run from the strangers of false teaching, other worldviews, media influence, etc. Why should we listen to the voice of Jesus because by following him we will be saved. He is the way. Jesus provides the entrance to eternal life. It is through Jesus that we find pasture.

It is Jesus who makes us lie down and find rest. It is Jesus who leads us beside still waters to feed on rich grazing land. Jesus is the only one who can give eternal and abundant life. Through him we have salvation. And this is why we listen to his voice, and this is why we follow Jesus: we do this because only he can give us true, lasting, and eternal life. This is life that overflows – like the Psalmist’s cup in Psalm 23, “my cup overflows” with life abundant when I enter the pasture through Jesus.

If receiving eternal and abundant life is why we listen to Jesus and enter pasture through him, then the next part of our passage tells us how he provides us with this eternal life. Look at verse 11 onward. Here Jesus begins to talk about the shepherd that lays down his life for the sheep. The good shepherd here is not like the hired hands that run when enemies attack the sheep; rather, the good shepherd cares for and protects the sheep, with his very life if necessary. A good shepherd may indeed have to give up his life to prevent the decimation of his flock by wild animals.”

There are several OT passages that talk about the leaders of Israel as bad or evil shepherds that cared nothing for the sheep: Ezekiel 34, Jeremiah 23, Zechariah 11. Here the primary image of the shepherd is that he is more concerned for himself than for the flock. “In each of these portraits, the flock is scattered and devoured by animals as a result of the shepherd’s neglect.” The picture Jesus paints of himself, however, is decidedly different. He will care for the sheep to the point of dying for them. This is why Jesus is the good shepherd, because he dies for the sheep.

“No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” Drawing on the image of shepherd, Jesus is telling us what he will ultimately have to do to secure the abundant life he offers: he needs to die and rise again. And in this death Jesus is in control. He is not a victim nor is he a martyr against his will. He freely chooses to lay down his life as an expression of his obedience to the Father. He says “I lay my life down” and that “no one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.” This is Jesus’ decision. It is an act of obedience to the Father; it is an act of love for us. Only after Jesus himself walks through “the valley of the shadow of death” will the gate to life be opened. And it is through his death that we receive life.

As city folks we may not know much about shepherding but we do know that we can be like sheep at times. Stupid, obstinate and stubborn. We need to also know that Jesus is patient with us, he is merciful, and he is full of grace. While we may be wayward and lose

direction, we know that Jesus can lead us beside still waters, that he calls us to follow him again and again. While we may make the same mistakes, we know that he offers forgiveness. While we may feel frightened and confused by what life throws at us, we know that Jesus' peace is also ours if we only seek and ask. While we may be defenseless, we know that Jesus is our protector, and our guide.

If you want to have Jesus as your shepherd – as your guide, protection, your source of forgiveness and mercy, understanding, and direction? Then listen to his voice – read the Scriptures – learn from him, learn about him. Seek him. Follow him. Get to know his voice. Jesus wants to be your shepherd and he wants bring back those who have strayed, bind up the injured, and strengthen the weak. He wants to lead each of us into rich pasture, into grazing land, into eternal, abundant life. AMEN