

Sermon - April 17, 2016 - Easter 4: Good Shepherd Sunday,

"I Am the Good Shepherd"



Dear Friends in Christ,
Grace, peace and mercy for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who also is our Good Shepherd.

We have been meditating on the words of Jesus when he said "I Am." Several times in the Gospels we hear him say "I Am." On Easter Sunday we hear him saying I Am the Resurrection and the Life." Then we hear that Jesus said he is the Light, and last Sunday we heard him saying "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart

from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5)

And today I would like to continue on one more theme, the Good Shepherd. Based on the Gospel of John chapter 10, there in verse 11, Jesus said: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." (John 10:11)

This is Good News indeed, for the Good Shepherd did lay down his life for the sheep. On Good Friday there on that Cross, he said "it is finished." With that he breathed his last paying for all our sins, redeeming us from sin, Satan and death. Yes, he defeated death once and for all, now he is alive! Jesus is risen, alleluia!! He is risen indeed!

Because of him we now have life, life eternal in heaven and for us to enter and arrive in Heaven, he is leading us there, for that's what a shepherd does too. He leads us to heaven.

But when he said "I'm the good shepherd" implies that there are others shepherds as well, but that are not good. Jesus said it so in the beginning of chapter 10: "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber." (John 10:1)

But who is this thief and robber? It is our spiritual enemy, Satan. He is the prince of darkness. He hates God and God's people. And his mission is to steal, kill and destroy everything that matters to the heart of God.

There is a power of evil in this world destroying lots of things that matter to God. We see that power at work everywhere, sickness, broken families, broken marriages, kids who make bad decisions, wars and more. Here and everywhere we see the enemy at work. That's what the enemy does, he governs the kingdom of death, and many are trapped in that kingdom. Jesus said: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."

Now, if Jesus is the Good Shepherd, then what makes us to be? Well, the sheep. Now this is what Jesus desires for his sheep: life, and abundant life! Or as the NIV translates this saying: "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." Jesus desires a full life for you! His sheep!

Now, I wonder sometimes why God, why Jesus calls us his sheep. Because characteristics and traits of sheep are not great, in fact, sheep are some of the dumb if not stupid animals. That's not nice then to be compared to a sheep, is it. But think

about that for a moment, maybe it is a good think we do have a Good Shepherd after all!

But to understand why God calls us his sheep I think is important that we examine some of the sheep traits and characteristics and see if they also apply to us human beings:

First, Sheep get lost easily. The prophet Isaiah describes this trait when he says: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way." (Is. 53:6)

Young sheep, lambs are prone to walk away from the shepherd's fold and get astray quickly and get hurt. But that's what we are, aren't we. We are like rebellious lambs that don't know much better so we walk away from the sheep pen, and very easily get lost in the traps of the false shepherd, the enemy, satan.

Second, sheep are defenseless. Different from other animals that have some or several forms of defense, sheep not so much; some can kick, some can fly away, some are really, really fast. Some blend into the environment. Sheep can't do anything; they're defenseless.

Similarly, on our own, without the body of Christ, and without the armor of God, without the protection of the Good Shepherd, and the shepherd's pen, the church, we are very vulnerable to the lies of the evil one.

So many are as sheep, believing the lies and living a life that leads to death and destruction, at least on the inside. Sheep are defenseless.

Three, sheep are very stubborn. Are you stubborn? Some of us are, if not all. Just like sheep, they don't like to change, they like that which is familiar to them. They are stubborn. They are like that girl who says: "I always get the bad guys. All the bad guys come after me." Well maybe she is stubborn and doesn't want to change!

Four, sheep are filthy. That's not good news either. They stink and don't have the ability to clean themselves. And when their wool is so thick, heavy, and on a hot day, wow, it does get stinky.

Now, does that say something about us? God says he sees us as dirty and stinky, we're actually not good, in fact the Bible says that all our good acts before God, mean nothing, they smell bad, because even though our good deeds are, well good, to God are not perfect for he is perfect. We are indeed very dirty, filthy sinners, falling away from God and way short from God's standards of perfection.

Now, if we all possess the same traits as sheep, then we do need a Shepherd, we do need a Savior. We need Jesus, and without him, we are vulnerable to the lies of the evil one. That's why it's really, really, good news when Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd," so good indeed that he adds "I would lay down my life for the sheep."

And he did, he died on the cross of Calvary for your sins, there redeeming us from the condemnation we deserved, instead he took that condemnation upon himself so you don't have to. And grants you entrance into Heaven, for he is the door for which we must enter, there is no other one. He is the one who washes away the stinkiness of our sins, he is the one who cleans us and brings us into God's presences as perfect little lambs!

But there is more. The Good Shepherd takes care of you, even here on this side of heaven. In Psalm 23, we see several ways the Good Shepherd leads you, which I would like to share with you today.

First, he leads you. The psalmist writes in verses 2 and 3: "He leads me beside still waters.... He leads me in paths of righteousness..." and like king David, we can say "The Good Shepherd leads me"

He leads us by the power of his voice, through his word as Jesus said: "The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice."

Do have big decision to make and you don't know what to do? When you seek the Good Shepherd, he will reveal himself to you and he will guide you. Through prayer and conversation with God, through His Word he will guide you.

When the Good Shepherd gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them and what do they do? The bible says, "And they follow him." Why? Because they know his voice. They know His word and can tell when another false shepherd is calling.

Can you tell the difference? Now, some of you may say, "Well, I don't know his voice, how can I tell the difference? Well, maybe you don't know the Shepherd yet, or you haven't spent enough time with him that you don't recognize his voice.

But the good news is that he wants you to get to know him, and get to know his voice so no other false shepherd can snatch you out of his sheep pen. He wants to call you by your name after all he wants to have a deep personal relationship with you. Yes he cares, he wants to lead you, he wants to call you by name, he wants you to recognize his voice.

Second, the Good Shepherd provides. Hear what Verses 1-3 of Psalm 23 say: "The 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 paths of righteousness for his name's sake."

Beautiful picture, don't you think so? It is said that sheep don't lie down very often because before they do, sheep have to have eaten well, they also need to be at peace with each other, and they also need to feel safe, or they will not lie down to rest.

Now think what the being in the presence of the good shepherd means: He leads us to green pastures, he provided for our every need materially, but also sustenance for our souls, his word and the sacraments, we are full indeed. He also brakes up fights among his sheep, yes, he has told us to love one another, and also that we forgive one another. And he keeps us secure, satan cannot still us away.

I like when the text says: "He leads me beside still water." Why quiet waters? Because, if there's rushing waters, sheep won't drink the rushing water. Why? Because they often fall in and they become like a giant cotton ball, washing down the river until they drown so they won't do that. But the Good Shepherd leads them to the right kind of water so they can drink in safety.

But Jesus also said that he will provide living water, the living water of salvation and of the Holy Spirit. And that living water will quench our inward thirst, refreshing our souls, so that we can be at rest. Your soul will be at rest on the inside because you know the good shepherd cares for you. The good shepherd guides, and the good shepherd provides.

The Good Shepherd also corrects. Yes he corrects us, now this may not be good news for the wandering sheep. The flesh doesn't like being corrected! We don't like being disciplined, but please keep this in mind, he does it so because he loves us.

In fact, Job, he knew this well. He said: "Behold, blessed is the one whom God reproves; therefore despise not the discipline of the Almighty. For he wounds, but he binds up; he shatters, but his hands heal." (Job 5:17-18)

Blessed is the one who God corrects, because when he corrects you he brings you out of danger, that's how much God loves you. But...

When a little lamb is straying of the flock, let's say on a rocky mountain, maybe a cliff, the shepherd then will come and rescue the lamb using his staff, his rod, which usually has a hook on one end. With the hook he will yank the lamb out of danger into safety. Now in the process the shepherd might crack the lamb's leg, or bruise some parts of its body, but that's ok, for the lamb will be safe in the long run. That's ok? Bruising the lamb or braking one of its legs doesn't sound caring at all. But the good shepherd will carry the lamb and bind his wounds, and soon enough the lamb will be healthy again, but it is safe!

Likewise, there are times when the Lord disciplines us and we don't like it, but remember that our Good Shepherd is delivering us from the consequences of our own stupid decisions and their consequences, especially from the condemnations of our sins.

Our Good Shepherd so loves, that he loves us enough even to correct us, to keep us out of further harm.

Dear Friends, we do have a Good Shepherd indeed. A Shepherd that leads you, a Shepherd that provides overflowing blessings, and a Shepherd who corrects so that you will not die, but instead walk in His ways and under his care.

With this Shepherd all is secure even when "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." (Psalm 23:4-6)

This is your Good Shepherd, this is you Savior, this is your Lord! That not only will sustain you here on this side of eternity but will lead you for an eternal rest in Heaven with him forever, where he will be our Good Shepherd forever, and you will be His precious Lambs, forever. He is the one who is telling you today: "I'm the Good Shepherd" your "Good Shepherd!"

In His name, amen.