

4/22/2018

## “Living and Loving With Authority”

Scripture: John 10:11-18; Psalm 23; (Acts 4:5-12; 1 John 3:16-24)

**Theme: By the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus our Good Shepherd gives us assurance and strength to live and love with authority as he did.**

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**Have you ever wondered about or struggled with the forces of darkness that seem to be so prevalent in the world today?** From major crimes like murder, physical or sexual abuse, human trafficking to victimization by internet scams, fraud, identity theft, bullying at school or harassment in the workplace.

Then, there's the constant availability and enticement of addiction to drugs and alcohol, gambling and pornography, even shopping and credit or debit card abuse. Sometimes, it's more a matter of walking down the path of a slippery slope than brazenly and intentionally doing something wrong.

The bad news, as we know all too well, is that Christian disciples and even leaders are not immune to such dangers and downfalls such as these and others.

† **But the really good news is that disciples of Jesus Christ have an option.**

We have a higher power that is always with us. We have someone who is watching over us, seeking to protect and guide us in the right and good way.

\* His name is **Jesus**. His way is the way that gives abundant life on earth, and leads to everlasting life in heaven. **For he is the way, the truth and the life.**

One image or metaphor that Jesus uses of himself, as we read from John's account of the gospel, is that of a shepherd. And not just any shepherd, but The Good Shepherd.

The **image of shepherd and flock** was not new to Jesus or to his hearers. This passage continues Jesus' earlier words to the Pharisees (9:41). It is based on Old Testament images of God as the shepherd of Israel (Genesis 48:15; 49:24; **Psalm 23:1**; 28:9; 77:20; 98:71; Isaiah 40:11; Ezekiel 34:11–31), of Israel as his flock (Ps 74:1; 78:52; 79:13; 100:3) and of abusive or unfaithful religious leaders as destroyers of his flock (Jeremiah 23:1–2; Ezekiel 34).

Faithful human shepherds (Jeremiah 3:15) included Moses, David (2 Samuel 5:2; Psalm 78:71–72) and the Davidic Messiah (Micah 5:4). (Craig Keener, The IVP Bible Background Commentary; New Testament. electronic ed. Downers Grove : InterVarsity, 1997, c1993)

Jesus says (vs. 11-13),

***“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.***

We can't be sure who Jesus was referring to when he talked about the hired hands, perhaps the

scribes and Pharisees.

And, he may well have been referring to the Roman Empire as the devouring wolf – because Roman legend had it that Rome itself “was founded by the twins Romulus and Remus. . . who were supposed to have been drowned in their infancy for their mother’s transgression, but were discovered on the river bank by a wolf that nursed them and saved their lives so that they could found Rome. The symbol of the city of Rome is a she-wolf.”

(Noelle Damico; Ministers Annual Manual, 5/3/09)

But, Jesus is the Good Shepherd, willing to lay down his life for his sheep. And, he has the power to take it up again!

† And **with the knowledge of who he is and what he is, Jesus affirms his relationship with us and ours with him.** (vs. 14-16)

*“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me — just as the Father knows me and I know the Father — and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.*

Jesus again uses language from the Old Testament to define our relationship to God as being part of God’s flock. The Old Testament often described Israel’s covenant relationship with God as ‘**knowing**’ him, which meant having an intimate and obedient relationship with him (e.g., Jeremiah 31:34; Hosea 6:6).

. . . So the questions these verses ask of each of us are: “**Do you know him?**”

Do you know God? Do you know Jesus Christ? Is he your shepherd? Do you have an intimate and obedient relationship with him?

† It’s important, because . . . **Having a relationship with Jesus is the first step to living and loving with authority.**

It is that relationship which Jesus has with the Creator God, our Father in Heaven.

Jesus said (vs.17-18):

*“The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life — only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.”*

**It is out of his intimate and obedient relationship with the Father that he will lay down his life for the sheep.** He goes on to say of his life:

*“I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”*

**Friends, what we do as Christ’s disciples stem from our relationship with him and our Father in heaven.**

We may not have to stand against oppression and injustice in the same way as he did, but certainly there are opportunities, even in our country today.

Whether it's standing against gun violence or defending rights of individuals, we can live and love with authority as Jesus did.

Whether it's upholding the dignity of a victim of crime, standing up for someone who is bullied or standing with victims of racial, gender or other bias, we can live and love with authority as Jesus did.

Whether it's looking out for someone who is infirmed or incapacitated or someone living alone and having difficulty making good decisions, we can help by living and loving with authority as Jesus did.

Some of us are called to be shepherds of Christ's flock, even as Peter and the other apostles and leaders of the early church were. And, all of us are called to live and love with authority, as part of the body of Christ. It pleases me to say that I see us living in these and other ways here at CCUMC.

Just as the early apostles and other disciples did; just as faithful disciples of Jesus have done down through the centuries -- we are still called and empowered by God, to live and love with authority given in his name!

† **To remain strong and transform the world we need to come together to worship, learn, grow and serve God.**

This is what it means to live and love with authority – with an intimate and obedient relationship with our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ.

**Remember, by the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus our Good Shepherd, gives us assurance and strength to live and love with power and authority as he did!**

May God bless you and strengthen and protect you today and always! Amen.

#### Pastoral Prayer

Good Shepherd, help us not to wander off the path of faithfulness with you. Give us the courage to hope even when there is danger or uncertainty all around. Stay with us through times of terror and counsel us with your experienced love -- love you demonstrated by laying down your life and then taking it up again. Make known your resurrection power in our lives, so that we may offer ourselves fully to the world for its well-being. Good Shepherd, show us what faithful living looks like in our time and grant us the intelligence, spiritual strength, and determination necessary to follow in your footsteps. Amen.