**4/21/24**

**Good Shepherd Sunday**

**John 10:11-18**

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:2, NRSV) (2) **Amen.**

Good morning and continued Easter blessings to each and every one of you out there. Welcome to what is often called Good Shepherd Sunday folks, and thank you for joining us. We are glad that you are here with us on the conference call, or out there in our pews. We are the church, and we are reminded of that fact yet again today as we learn that every one of us is vital in the flock. We are made aware that the Good Shepherd has his eye on you, and each and every one of us too. He loves you and I, and he calls us all to be his very own. Now, I can confirm for you that he is not trying to own us, or make us lose our very identities, but he is trying to ensure that we will be with him in the eternal kingdom. Christ does not want there to be any wandering or lost souls, just as the shepherd in today’s story does not want there to be any wandering or lost sheep.

Now, you know I have to admit that today is a very exciting day to preach. I do not want you to think that I am saying other Sundays and Services are not exciting to preach at, but what I am saying is that there are so many different ways to go with this Gospel Reading today. However, there is one main or central focus right out there in the open. The main focus calls us all back to center and forever reminds us of why we actually do speak of and learn about the Good Shepherd today. So, I will try and highlight that in a little bit of a different manner in an effort to break things down a bit for you and for I. For I want to make sure that all of us leave here with the understanding that we are indeed called to realize through each and every one of the readings, prayers, hymns, and psalm today.

We do indeed hear and continue to learn that we have a God who is always searching for us and calling us by name. I mean he will continue to search for us to the very ends of the earth if he has to. We come to realize that this very pursuit is endless because his love has no bounds. We as humans struggle with this at times unfortunately because we do indeed have limits. That might very well be why he highlights the hired hand in our Gospel Reading today, and with this reminder he informs us that this hired hand is only willing to do so much for the sheep. He is only doing his job temporarily, and is only watching over the sheep. When the line is drawn and the hired hand has to care for the sheep and step out and up against the wolf to protect them, he chooses his life over the sheep. However, Christ reminds us that he is not like that at all, and he reassures us that he is willing and will always go the extra mile for us. He reminds us that he has gone as far as laying down his very own life for us. So, we are continually reminded that when we have feelings of being lost or alone we come to realize that we can hand those feelings right over to God and that we indeed really never are alone. Christ reminds us that he is there even in our darkest hour. He reminds us that he will be there for us whenever, wherever, and however we need him. We indeed have a Good Shepherd who exhibits his love through care and protection, and more importantly he offers us grace. The grace that is so vital to each and every one of us.

Now, I know that sometimes this thought of sheep and a flock can tend to escape most of our mindsets. I would venture that many of us in this room or on this conference call have not worked on a farm or tended to any sheep or any cattle before. Yeah, maybe a visit to the local farm, or even one when we were out of town on vacation. However, this was not our job or our daily responsibility or livelihood. Unfortunately, this imagery is very easy to get lost in, but that is only if we allow for that as well. We can put our minds out to pasture just like the cattle, or we can gather our minds and thoughts, and we can gather today as well and learn together just like we are doing here in this space this morning. We can break things down, and we can understand things with one another that we sometimes just cannot understand on our own. The Good Shepherd indeed calls us together for support. He calls us together for strength. We are called together because of his boundless and unending love, and we remind each other of that. We do not have to worry about being the farmhand, we just have to focus on being one with the flock. Now, don’t let that make you think you are void of and dismissed of any responsibility here though.

We as a flock have joined one another today to worship and to eat and drink with one another. It is extremely vital that we do this as we are indeed called by the Good Shepherd to be the church. We are called to this very table together for Holy Communion, and we hear the words “Do this in remembrance of me” later on in our liturgy for a reason. We are reminded of the very call to love one another just as he taught and showed us. We are also reminded of the call to grow this flock and show others his love and compassion out there in the world as well. Sharing is indeed caring, and it is a vital part of our faith.

Thankfully we are also not limited to these four walls and this very building that stands around us. We are also reminded that our faith is also not one size fits all. We have many different personalities and many different thought processes. We actually learn that is why there are many different churches with various different practices. We also learn, and are reminded that their central belief and love is all focused on Christ, just as ours is too. Now, It may seem like we are out there wandering off at times, but we are indeed one flock and one sound when it all comes down to it. That is how we all identify as Christians.

We also invite others to church for sure, and we invite others to share in our beliefs. However, just as I said a few short moments before, we come to realize that his flock is the greater church whether that is indeed Lutheran, Catholic, Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, Anglican, Born Again, Pentecostal, Assemblies of God, Non-Denominational, or whatever the like. That is why there are ecumenical gatherings. It reminds us of our call to bond together, and our call to protect and watch over one another as we support one another as the greater church. That is the vital essence of being a flock because there are so many things out there in the world that can cause doubt, or things that can even try and get us to leave the fold. I know we all want to grow and build this very church we are at right now, but I want to remind you that there is a mixture of folks in here right at this very second as well. Our call is not to solely build the building we worship in, but to build and grow the entire flock. We get to share with others and tell them our cool and exciting experiences with our Good Shepherd. We get to share why he continues to call us, and why he continues to gather us together, and why he continues to call them as well. Church is indeed an experience, and it is one to be had by every and any one out there.

Speaking of that, there was one particularly cool story I happened to read in my research that I would like to share with you to highlight this very point. So, here we go… “Marilyn Laszlo was a missionary in Papua New Guinea. She put the language of her village in written form and was teaching 200 people to read and write. One day, people from another village visited and saw the people from the first village going to church, singing, and being taught the Bible in their language by one of their own villagers. The leader from the second village asked Marilyn to come to his people and put their language into writing “so that we might know about God too.” Marilyn told him that she had “several more years of work in this place,” and the leader went away very disappointed. Weeks later, Marilyn organized a search party to find that village. After an all-day search, they found it and the village leader “was thrilled” to see them. Marilyn says, “We were the first white people to come into that village, so we were quite a sight. As we were walking through the village I noticed in the center a new building, very different from their regular houses. I asked, What is that new building in the center of the village?” The leader said, “Oh, that is God’s house - that’s our church.” “Your church?” Marilyn asked. “Do you have a mission here?” “Oh no, we have never had a mission here.” “Well, do you have a pastor here - you know, someone that comes to preach God’s Word?” “Oh no, we’ve never had a pastor here.” Well, is there someone here in the village that can read and write Pidgin English who holds services in your church?” “Oh no. There is no one here that can read or write. And we have no books.” Marilyn looked at him and said, “Then what is that building for?” He said, “Well, we saw the little church in your village and our people decided to build a church too. Now we’re waiting. We’re waiting for someone to come and tell us about God in our talk, in our language.” [Confessing Christ as Lord, Urbana 1981, p. 213ff]” (4)

I know I often say that we should show others just a little bit of Christ. I also know that it is easier said than done more often or not. It is easy to respond to anger with anger. It is easy to respond to frustration with frustration. It is even easy to respond to avoidance by avoiding one another or a situation. However, that is not what the Good Shepherd would do. That is not what we are called to do by the very example he set forth. Now, do you see why I was excited to preach today? It is the very essence of our faith. It is the very essence of our being. To love one another and grow together with one another in the flock.

We hear in verse 16, “I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.” (1) Through this very message in our Gospel Reading today I want to end off with another very important story I read in my research, and here it is… “There's the story of the pastor who was serving at a mission church in downtown Chicago. He lived right there in downtown, and he had made a promise to God that he would not go to bed without witnessing to at least one person a day. It was getting late and he was about to go to bed when he realized that he hadn't witnessed to anyone that day. He wanted to keep his promise to God, so he went out into the street at night, and walked up to the first person he saw - a total stranger standing by a bus stop. "Are you a Christian?" he asked the man. The man screamed at him, told him that he was doing more harm than good in the world, and that Christians were worthless. A week later, that same man attended the church service of that pastor. "I'm sorry for what I said," he said to the pastor. "I haven't been able to stop thinking about my life, and God, and my soul, since you talked to me last week at the bus stop." That man came to faith in Christ, by the grace of God, and turned out to be one of the hardest working volunteers and Sunday School teachers in that church.” (3)

The very stories I shared are faith in action. They may look similar to what you and I do, or they may look drastically different as well. This is where our differences happen to align This is the essence of the Gospel. This is the very essence of God’s continued work in the hands of us, his very own disciples, of his very own flock today. I have chose to focus on verse 16 a lot for the very purpose of the fact that “Jesus dies not only for His first followers, but also for others whom He will bring into His flock. Note the priority that Jesus attaches to this. Jesus says, “I must bring them also…” (4) We are called and we cannot deny sharing his love with others. So, go out and share and let us all do work to grow the flock so that no one misses out on the eternal kingdom! You all have the Good Shepherd inside your heart!

Amen.

**References**

(1) Sundays and Seasons

 Preaching

 Year B 2024

 April 21st, 2024

 Fourth Sunday of Easter

(2) Bible.com

(3) SermonCentral.com

 I Have Other Sheep

 Contributed by Don Schultz on Apr 24, 2012

 Scripture: John 10:11-18

 Denomination: Lutheran

(4) SermonCentral.com

 The Good Shepherd In Today’s World

 Contributed by Anthony Seel on Apr 22, 2018

 Scripture: John 10:11-16

 Denomination: Lutheran

**John 10:11-18**

 In language that recalls the twenty-third psalm, Jesus describes himself as the

 shepherd who cares for his sheep. He is willing to die for them, and he is able to

 overcome death for them.

 [Jesus said:] 11“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life

 for the sheep. 12The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the

 sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf

 snatches them and scatters them. 13The hired hand runs away because a hired

 hand does not care for the sheep. 14I am the good shepherd. I know my own and

 my own know me, 15just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I

 lay down my life for the sheep. 16I have other sheep that do not belong to this

 fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one

 flock, one shepherd. 17For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down

 my life in order to take it up again. 18No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of

 my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again.

 I have received this command from my Father.”