

Sermon Easter 3 2020

April 26, 2020

John 10:11-16

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson, previously read; Jesus as our Good Shepherd. Amen.

Those blessed words of the 23rd Psalm. **The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. 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. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.** Amen. As we hear those words again, these are words I know I have found so comforting in my own life. Words that remind me of my Lord's care. Words that are wonderful to repeat in my head when I can't sleep, sometimes helping me to drift off. Words that remind me that God wants what is best for me when circumstances seem to contradict His love for me, or my own doubt creeps in that I should trust Him for what is best. Words that comfort me when my doubt would cause me to believe that because of my great sinfulness the Lord would not desire my salvation. Yes the Lord is my Shepherd.

As Jesus says in the Gospel Lesson, He is not only our Shepherd, no He is our Good Shepherd. He is the One who is good, who is noble, who upright and beautiful in a moral sense, in His virtue. And to make the point of His goodness, to what does He contrast Himself?

He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd.

Yes, in contrast to Christ, our Good Shepherd, there is the hired hand. The hired hand cares nothing for the sheep. As soon as the hired hand sees trouble, he's gone. He doesn't care whether the sheep are eaten. He doesn't care if they wander off and die. He's got no skin in the preservation of the sheep. He's just there for the paycheck.

As I was growing up, I worked both in a pizza restaurant in High School and doing demolition in college. In these roles, I saw people come and go in the work. And there were times you could see this mentality. You saw the people that came to the pizza restaurant that didn't care what the pizza delivered to the table or to the home looked like. They didn't care if the toppings were right. They didn't care if the cheese was evenly distributed. They didn't care if it slid around the box and got smushed. They didn't care. Likewise in working demolition. They didn't care if they did the job right. They could have cut this hole as they were supposed to, or cut down that wall where they should. They didn't care if it was because someone else could come and fix it. They were just there for their four hour shift, or their forty hour shift, so they could get their money and go home and do whatever they really wanted to do.

And of course you see this in the church. There are those teachers in the church who don't really appear to care what they say about God, just as long as they keep getting paid. I just heard, for example, that Jim Bakker was bemoaning that he had been cut off from receiving credit card payments for his ministry after claiming to sell a cure for coronavirus. Now, to be fair, he did not claim this cure was sufficient for Covid-19, but due to the circumstances, his claim to sell a cure seems opportunistic. All the more, it is sad how many people send him their money who can hardly afford to. Apparently he's only able to receive their cash now. The fact that he already has so much material wealth seems like he cares more about the money than he does the sheep, doesn't it? It by all appearances seems that he is this hired hand. And this is sad.

Of course, ultimately, what Jesus is talking about here isn't just people teaching in the Church, isn't just pastors and preachers. No, when he talks about the wolf coming, what He's referring to is the dangers of being in this sin fallen world, the dangers posed to His sheep of sin, death, and the devil. The attacks that come from them, that come as a result of these through our sinful natures, through the world, through the devil himself. And as these attacks come, what He is making the point to show us is that He is the One who has seen these wolves coming and He hasn't fled.

Now, of course, in the midst of our circumstances, I keep making the point about these, that our Lord Jesus has won the victory over them. They have been defeated in His resurrection. They are now under His authority and He is able to direct them to His own ends which are good.

But in order to win that victory, what do we see? We see His life. We see that the devil, the great wolf came and thought he could devour Jesus as Jesus dressed in the clothing of a sheep. As Jesus speaks elsewhere of wolves in sheep's clothing, we could say that the wolf, who so often dresses in sheep's clothing was exposed and overcome by the Shepherd who disguised Himself in sheep's clothing to win the victory. So we see that aspect of His life, His coming to us in the flesh of man. But what else do we see?

Although I've been sort of speaking in this disguise and clothing analogy, we see that Jesus actually came as God in the flesh of man of not actually disguising Himself as such, but revealing Himself. And the greatest revelation is the same way He showed Himself to be the Good Shepherd. When the wolf came for Him, He didn't flee. No, He stood firm and He let the wolf devour Him. Think about how you hear this in the reading from Peter, from our Epistle. Peter describes Jesus as our Shepherd saying this: **“He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.”**

Now of course, that language there comes so much from Isaiah 53:4-9. So much of that description is right out of that passage, in fact for homework, I encourage you to take some time and compare them in your daily devotions this week. Look at this comparison between I Peter 2 and Isaiah 53. But for our purposes today, I just want to make that point that in this laying down of His life, we see just how Jesus is that Good Shepherd. We see that He proves it because He didn't flee. No, He didn't run. Instead, where we deserved to be devoured, He put His own life down for us. He set it down and He was willingly nailed to the tree for our transgressions. He was scourged that by His stripes we would be healed. And in that He stood in our place in death, that we would have life in His resurrection. Christian, He stood in your place that you would have life in His resurrection.

Think, then about what that means. I read a book recently in which the narrator described love by saying, *“I've reached the point now of sometimes thinking that love consists precisely in the right, voluntarily granted by the beloved object, to be tyrannized over.”* Isn't that what our Lord Jesus shows us? He was tyrannized over on the cross for us as the Good Shepherd.

As I say all of that, though, there is this point where we can say, so what? Sure this is comforting, and that's all nice, but what does it matter? In particular, we can ask "what does it matter as we're all stuck in our houses and there are people dying of Covid-19?" What does it matter when we can see that there's such a disruption to the economy and possibly our own livelihood? What does it matter when we can see so many people struggling with their circumstances and their mental health in the midst of it?

I'm reminded of when Jesus is on the boat, and the storm comes. The waves are crashing over the edge of the boat, and it's looking like the boat could be overcome and the disciples could drown. The disciples come to the back of the boat, there's Jesus. He's in the boat with them, but what's He doing? They're in this spot where it's looking like they could drown, and here they know that Jesus is able to work all things, and what's He doing? He's asleep. And they yell to Him, "Don't you care? Don't you care that we could drown?" And Jesus wakes up and calms the storm, and says, "Oh ye of little faith."

That word there when they ask Jesus if He cares is the same that Jesus uses to describe the hired hand that doesn't care. The hired hand doesn't care. But The Good Shepherd does care. He cares for you. He cares for your provision. He cares for your mental health. He cares for your well-being. He proves it because He has loved you and laid down His life for you. He proves it because He voluntarily granted that He be tyrannized over by you, by your sin, in His love for you. Willingly in the authority He has from the Father. And all the more He cares for your eternal welfare. In fact, He cares so much for your eternal welfare that He knows the benefit to that welfare in contrast to what you would desire in earthly happiness and comfort.

But that's where those words of the 23rd Psalm are so comforting. **The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.** His goal for us is that good. His goal for us is truly the green pastures. We might push against it, and He might smack us with His rod and snag us back with His staff, but He's getting us to where we need to go. And we know that's good. It's good because He is Good, our Good Shepherd. Amen.