

John 10:1-10. Good Shepherd Sunday: May 11, 2014.

Introduction to the Service:

One of the beautiful pictures in the Bible that God uses to assure us, believers, of his care is: the Shepherd-sheep relationship. Psalm 100: "We are his people, the sheep of his pasture."

Consider the connection that makes the Good Shepherd theme so fitting for inclusion in the Easter Season. The Lord **IS** my Shepherd. Without the resurrection of Jesus, it would be impossible to say that. If Jesus was still dead, we could say: The Lord was a good shepherd, at one time, for those who were present to hear him and follow him and be cared for by him. But only if he is risen and alive can we say, "The Lord **IS** my Good Shepherd."

The Good Shepherd sacrificed himself for us. However, that in itself - though noble - would not be enough. What good would it do for an earthly shepherd, out in the wild with his flock, to fight with a wolf, and kill the wolf, but die in the process? Then the demise of the sheep might be delayed, but not undone. If the shepherd is dead, then the sheep are "dead meat." Some other foe will soon find them and polish them off.

But Jesus' battle to the death wasn't the end for our good Shepherd. Oh, he certainly died. Jesus had forecast his death. But he also foretold: "I have authority to lay my life down **and** authority to take it up again."

He went into death to conquer sin and death for us. He walked out of the clutches of death victorious, guaranteeing His people – all who believe in Him are given the victory out of the clutches of sin and death.

And, he lives – now and always – to bless us with his love.

There are a number of important points that we will look at today from John 10 vs.1-10, which we want to see & treasure, that tell: how he lives to bless us.

CONFESSION OF SINS

Based on the thought from Isaiah 53:6.

M: O Lord, like lost sheep, we have strayed from your paths and sinned. Together, we come before you and confess our sins:

C: Lord, I have not always listened to your Shepherding voice, as it speaks to me through the Word. Instead, many times I have listened to my sinful self. I have wandered from your will. I have not always appreciated and trusted your Shepherding care. I have not always appreciated and loved the other sheep, my fellow believers, whom you have placed around me.

M: O Lord, we have a tendency toward pride. We like to think that we are quite able to take care of ourselves and to get ourselves out of any difficulty. When it comes to our sin, lead us to abandon all such thoughts.

C: We acknowledge that we are just as helpless as wandering sheep, who become entangled in the briars along a steep cliff. We are unable to pull ourselves out of this terrible situation into which we, by our own doing, have strayed. Lord, I admit I have sinned, and I come to you for mercy.

ABSOLUTION

Based on Isaiah 53:6; 1 Peter 2:25; John 10:15.

M: Jesus, our Good Shepherd, willingly set out to rescue us - lost sheep. He was pricked and torn by cruel thorns, and he even gave his own life, so that we – trapped in the pit of sin – might be rescued. “We all like sheep have gone astray. And the Lord has laid on him – Jesus – the iniquity of us all. By his wounds we are healed.” Be assured: all who trust in Him are safe forever.

SERMON:

1 "I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. 2 The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. 3 The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." 6 Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them. 7 Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. 8 All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. 9 I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Quality care is a highly valued commodity. Just ask Brent Bitter (the preschool director over at our church in Charlotte) and Pastor Kiecker (from up at Gethsemane in Raleigh) for evidence. They shared updates as we traveled together this past week. They have to endure a pretty grueling process, in order to keep a “5-star” rating for their church’s preschools. That 5-star rating means something to parents who are looking for quality care for their children: “Will my child be safe & secure? Will he/she be surrounded by a caring & nurturing environment?”

Whether our kids are at home, or outside of it... throughout the different stages as they grow up, making sure our kids have quality care is a priority for parents.

Think now especially of their spiritual care. After all, life on this earth is just that. What about their eternal wellbeing? This is why you, parents, have brought your children to a place where you know God’s Word will be taught in its truth and purity. For you know there are so many voices calling to them from the world

– voices which are so alluring, so tempting, so outwardly pleasing ~ while inwardly they are raging for your children’s eternal destruction.

Whether you are a child who was brought here today, or you’re here because others brought you when you were a child (and now you get yourself here), or you are someone who first came as a grown-up: you are here, listening to your Shepherd’s voice.

Jesus tells us: his sheep listen to his voice; we follow him because we know his voice. You have been brought to know - his voice stands out in all the world: His words are 100% accurate, 100% trustworthy. You know He speaks them to us for our wellbeing. When you and I turn here, to the Bible – His Word, you can be confident that every bit is true, significant and given for your temporal, spiritual and eternal benefit.

Here you are assured of very personal, quality care of the highest degree. God made you his own child when he gifted you faith in Jesus. He knows you by name. He knows your individual life history. He knows your hurts. He knows your weaknesses. And he assures you: “I have healing for you. I have all power, and I use it to protect you. I have truth, and I will use it to guide you through this world until you reach your heavenly home with me. You are, after all, mine. Through faith, you are mine. Oh, my dear child, my precious lamb!”

The danger is this...To think: “I can take care of myself.” To put it another way: “I don’t need you anymore – at least, not to ‘stand over my shoulder’ like I’m such a child, God. I can navigate my way through things; I got this. I can handle this, and I’m doing a pretty good job. If I need you or your advice, I know where to go.”

When I listen to this Word [Bible], His Word, I’m not just going to Him for advice to take or leave – like I do when I approach a friend for advice. He is my leader. I’m not in a relationship here where I say: “maybe I can get him to come around to my way of thinking.” You see, this relationship is not an “indulgent, let-me-give-you-everything-you-want” type of connection. Be glad about that fact. That wouldn’t be any good for you.

Jesus, Our good Shepherd, redirects us, when we begin to stray. Treasure the truth: He uses his Word, like a shepherd with a staff (show this), to call/direct you back on track when you begin to detour from His will. You can trust his intention in this. His goal is always to keep you, His sheep, from wandering off in harm’s path - to keep each of us on the path where we are safe.

You see: Our safety is in him, now and eternally.

That’s the truth Jesus tells us today in His words: “I am the gate for the sheep... I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will... find pasture. ... [He will] have life, and have it to the full.”

Maybe – just maybe – you can think of a time, when your mother or father gave you some instruction, and you thought: “I’m big enough to take care of myself. I can make decisions for myself.” “I know better than they do, with their old-fashioned ideas.” “I want to do my own thing my own way.”

If we’re honest with ourselves, we hear the connection as we turn this direction [facing the altar/cross]. Maybe you heard it back in the confession of our sins at the beginning of the service. Pride. Self-sufficiency. My way, placed above listening to the Lord.

To combat this, we are encouraged to focus on our Shepherd’s voice – to take out our Bibles & to take every opportunity for Bible study. You all have heard that spoken from this pulpit again and again and again. (Maybe you’re sick of hearing it!) But we know how easily we wander, no matter how firm our resolve is “this time.” In His Word, our God encourages us to face the sin that so often entangles us and to come clean about it. Openly. Much as we may shudder to do so. Kind of eats away at our pride, doesn’t it? Yes, we confess before others and before our God the truth about ourselves – there’s no hiding how much we need our Savior.

And then he delivers the news of the greatest healing that he brings us: remember the words of the absolution earlier. Jesus, our Good Shepherd, gave his life, in order to rescue you out of the pit of your sin. The Lord has laid on him the sin of us all. And by his wounds, we are healed. Listen – he assures you: “I am the gate: whoever enters through me will be saved. He will... have life, and have it to the full.”

The awe that comes from taking a close look at just what our Savior did for me ~ draws me to Him. I’m overwhelmed and humbled when I understand that the love He showed for me and for you by allowing himself to go through Hell to save us ~ is a love that this world had never seen before. I want to follow the One who loves and cares for me so much. I want to dig into His Word, and to mine every bit of wisdom I can for my journey through my life. That very Word gives us new appreciation for our Good Shepherd’s voice, and new strength to follow Him. We rejoice to see the truth: “He goes on ahead of us, his sheep, and we follow him.”

The Lord **is** your Shepherd. He is here to take care of you every moment. His goodness and mercy are new for you every day. He provides for all your needs. You can rest secure in his care. And you can be confident of the eternal life that is yours through him. So thank him with everything in you; serve Him; trust him. His care and love give you life – life to the full!

To close: think how much it means to be able to rise to each new day knowing... I have a Savior who lives to bless me with his love. I’m cared for by Jesus through life and through death. Think of how it would be to go through your days without knowing that.

Invite kids up, in order to see a reminder of this... Kids' portion: the man who was searching for happiness & safety/security that would last... nothing in all the universe provided it... friend points him to the cross/Jesus.

We especially note: Jesus didn't stay hanging dead on the cross. He didn't stay lying dead in his tomb. He rose. He lives to bless us with his love: now and forever. Amen

Prayers

Good Shepherd

M: Let us join together in expressing confidence in our Good Shepherd's care.

Risen and ascended Lord, in your loving care we can live every day without worrying; no needful thing will you fail to provide:

C: **The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.**

M: By your holy word you feed our souls and strengthen our faith. In your gracious forgiveness we are refreshed and restored:

C: **The Lord makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul.**

M: You turn us away from the paths of sin, and move us to walk in the ways of God:

C: **The Lord guides me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.**

M: Though we walk in danger all the way, though the shadows of death enfold us at last, we will not fear. Your love goes with us wherever we go; in your comforting word we find courage and strength; your triumphant cross brings life from death:

C: **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.**

M: You have called us to sit at your heavenly feast. Our table of blessing overflows, and you will not allow earthly enemies, nor Satan himself, to snatch them away:

C: **You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies: you anoint my head with oil: my cup overflows.**

M: Good Shepherd, your mercies will never end. They will follow us. Grant us to walk in your grace and love till we come to dwell in the heavenly home which you have prepared for us above:

C: **Surely, goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen.**

Mother's Day

We marvel, O Creator, at the miracle we call birth. You formed each of us in our mother's womb, you knit us together there & through a mother's labor you brought each of us into this world.

We did not enter life as a mature adult. We were not able to stand on our own two feet and take care of ourselves. Lord, you chose to put us in the protective and nourishing care of parents. For all the parents -

especially on this day - for all the acts of love flowing from the hearts and hands of the mothers who cared, we give you thanks.

And many of us have received much more from our mothers. For those among us who learned about you through our mothers... how could we ever thank such a mother enough? How can we thank you enough, O God, who gave that mother to us? Receive our thanks Lord, and lead us to hold in high regard and show respect - each to our own mother, and to the Christian mothers present here with us today.

In the midst of a joyful day like this, we recognize: there are many in our world who don't experience the love of a mother. You in your Word show us you understand this sad reality in our fallen world – that a mother may forget her own child. And so, in the same Word you assure: “Though she may forget, I will not forget you.” Comfort us – and your people everywhere in our world – with the abiding assurance of your presence, love and almighty care.

Lord, sustain and comfort those whose mother's have departed life in this world. We miss them, Lord. Be our resting place, Lord, in times of loneliness or sadness. We give you thanks for those mother's whom you brought to the end of their life here in faith. We give thanks that you have provided them rest in your presence.