

Sermon for May 11th, 2014

Fourth Sunday after Easter, John 10:1-10

Christ is Risen!!! He is Risen Indeed!!! Alleluia

I **love** saying that together because I feel it is **good** for us to remember that Easter is not just one Sunday a year when we come to celebrate our risen Lord—Easter **season** lasts all the way up to Pentecost which means it is a **season of 8 weeks**. This is good for us to remember.

When I was in Confirmation class, a **number** of years ago, **one** of the things that we had to memorize was the 23rd Psalm, which we read together this morning. **Also**, during one of our Wednesday midweek Lenten services this year, **this** psalm was the **focus** of our worship time together.

For those of you who were there at that service you would have heard it said that in these 6 short verses King David wrote one of the **best known** psalms of **all** time. This psalm is filled with lovely relationship language which gives us **comfort and security**: *we lie down in green pastures, we are being led beside still waters, the shepherd who guides us restores our souls, we are being led in right paths for His name sake, and because of the Good Shepherd our cup overflows—we shall not be in want.* It is also filled with vivid and beautiful words of **trust**: *even though we walk through the darkest valley we will fear no evil for you are with us, your rod and your staff they comfort us, you prepare a table before us in*

the presence of our enemies, you anoint our heads with oil, and surely goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives.

This image of a **loving** shepherd is one which prevails in the bible **especially** in the Old Testament. In fact, the terms shepherd, sheep, and flock are used more than **600** times in the bible. In biblical times the bond that existed between the shepherd and the sheep was **extremely** close. Shepherds would tend the **same** flock for **many** years, they would **name** the sheep and **call them** out of the sheepfold. The sheep would come to know their shepherd's voice so they would not follow a stranger—as often times a **number** of shepherds would put their sheep in the **same** sheepfold for safe keeping at night.

Shepherds would lay down their lives for the sake of the flock—they kept the flock safe from harm, they were the ones who led the flock in the direction they needed to go, and they were the ones who walked before the sheep so they would **not** lose their way. What the sheep did was dependent on the guidance of the shepherd.

There is a story about a tour group that had gone to the **Holy Land**. On their travels they came upon a sheep pen that was built of boulders and mortar where the sheep would be kept at night. There was a shepherd nearby. **One** of the people on the tour **said** to the shepherd, *“There must not be any wild animals around here because I notice that on your sheep pen there is no gate.”* The old shepherd

replied, “I am **glad** to tell you about the sheep today, but I want to tell you that I am the gate. That opening that you see is my bedroom where I sleep at night to keep the sheep safe from harm.” The life of a shepherd is **hard**. They are **never** off duty. It is a 24 hour a day job to be responsible **for** and to **keep** the sheep safe.

But to be **honest** with you though, all this being said about the **care and attention** the shepherd would give regarding their sheep—sheep are **not** known as one of God’s brightest creatures. They are known to be timid, gullible, they have little or no means of self-defense, they are not fast runners, and they tend to make the same mistakes over and over again all of which makes them **easy** prey. They are easily ‘**cast**’ which means they are easily **flipped over** on their back or on their side and if they are not up righted or helped up by the shepherd they will **die** of starvation, they need the shepherd to lead them otherwise they may follow each other blindly **even** to the point of death, they need the most care of **all** livestock, and they are totally dependent on the shepherd for their needs. **Not** such a good image of what it means to be a sheep.

In our reading for today from the **gospel** of John Jesus says, “*The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The sheep hear his voice; he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, the sheep follow him because they know his voice.*”

We are the sheep of God's pasture. We Christians know Jesus to be our Good Shepherd. **Listening** requires a voice to be heard and **following** requires a leader to follow. We **listen** to Jesus' voice. We **follow** Jesus' lead. Our shepherd **knows** us, He **calls** us by name—each and every one of us, and **gave** His life for us because we surely cannot save ourselves. **That** is why Jesus died on the cross for us—so we could live and have life abundantly.

It is true that **without** the shepherd's guidance we can easily go astray. We can easily get lost and turn to go down the wrong path. On our **own** accord we have **no way** to contend with the thieves and bandits of this world that Jesus speaks of who come to steal, kill, and destroy. We need someone to **protect** us, someone to **trust** in, someone to **listen** to, someone to **gently** guide us, and someone who comes to **seek us out** when we are going the wrong direction. As the sheep of the Good Shepherd do we listen to hear His voice calling us amongst the competing noises of the world calling us **here and there**?

As we hear **once again** at the words of the 23rd psalm think of it as a way for us to find peace within ourselves and our world—a world which is filled with so many distractions which **pull** us away from hearing God's voice. Distractions which **invade** our lives when we are the most sensitive and the most vulnerable—*I will fear no evil for you are with me; you prepare a table before me in the presence*

of my enemies, your rod and your staff they comfort me, surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life.

My prayer for **you all** is that you not only find hope and promise in the words of the **23rd psalm**, a place where we are called to **rest** in God's **holy** presence—where we can find **rest** for body, mind, and spirit. But that you **also** may find God's grace and mercy in the **truth** that we have a God who loves us so much that He sent His one and only Son to die a **painful** death on the cross so that **we** may have life and have it abundantly. All the time—remembering **that** is what the **Easter** season is about. Thanks be to God. **AMEN**