

Week Five: I AM the Good Shepherd

Wednesday, March 14, 2018

by: Misty Coyle

¹¹⁻¹³ "I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd puts the sheep before himself, sacrifices himself if necessary. A hired man is not a real shepherd. The sheep mean nothing to him. He sees a wolf come and runs for it, leaving the sheep to be ravaged and scattered by the wolf. He's only in it for the money. The sheep don't matter to him.

¹⁴⁻¹⁸ "I am the Good Shepherd. I know my own sheep and my own sheep know me. In the same way, the Father knows me and I know the Father. I put the sheep before myself, sacrificing myself if necessary. You need to know that I have other sheep in addition to those in this pen. I need to gather and bring them, too. They'll also recognize my voice. Then it will be one flock, one Shepherd. This is why the Father loves me: because I freely lay down my life. And so I am free to take it up again. No one takes it from me. I lay it down of my own free will. I have the right to lay it down; I also have the right to take it up again. I received this authority personally from my Father."

John 10:11-18 The Message (MSG)

Continuing on from his previous statement about the shepherd, Jesus stated, I AM the Good Shepherd. He said this to set himself apart from the Pharisees who are the hired hands. This reminds me of when I was in high school. Our church presented a children's musical, "We Like Sheep". Based on the parable of the 99 sheep, "We Like Sheep" follows the antics of Grimey, who leaves the flock only to realize that the Good Shepherd will leave the 99 just to find him. As the remaining Ewes and Rams reflect on the Jesus love for them, everyone learns that "No matter how baaaad we are the Shepherd loves us" and celebrates when Grimey is brought back into the flock. I loved the song "No Matter How Baaaaad We Are" and the "Shepherd's Hall of Fame". The songs speak to the congregation about how Jesus will never let us go and he is so awesome he should be in the hall of fame for shepherds.

The Pharisees were willing to let anyone go if they did not follow the law. They were not in the business of saving anyone and showing the way to God. They were more worried about what rules were broken and what ceremonies had to be done to please God. Jesus is saying here, I AM the Good Shepherd and the only one to set the true example of how to follow God (like sheep). I am the only one willing to lay my life down for you to bring you closer to God. I am the only one who can love you as my Father loves me. I will find you when you are lost and bring you back home. I AM the Good Shepherd.

I AM, Good Shepherd, as we like sheep, have gone astray from time to time, we want to come home to you. We want to follow you. Thank you for being the example. Thank you for being the Lamb of God. We praise you, we thank you, and we worship you. Help us show the love you expect us to show others. Amen, so be it!

Thursday, March 15, 2018

by: Phil Hornbostel

David said to Saul, "Let no one's heart fail because of [Goliath]; I will go and fight with this Philistine". Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are just a boy, and he has been a warrior from his youth." But David said to Saul, "I, your servant, used to keep sheep for my father; and whenever a lion or a bear came, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth; and if it turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down and kill it. . . . The Lord who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of the Philistine".--I Samuel 17: 32-35, 37

David, like Jesus, was a good shepherd. And fearlessly defended the flock of Jesse, his father, from those who would prey upon the smallest of the sheep. In facing Goliath, David is not commanded by God to stand against him; rather, David had great faith that this Philistine who had "defied the armies of the living God" would be delivered into his hands. And in faith, David risked his life, out of a sense of justice against the power of evil, just as Jesus, the good shepherd, gives his life to save his sheep from the power of evil. We are called to be shepherds for the weakest of our community, to guide them into greener pastures, and at the same time, to defend them against the evils in the world.

No one is asking us to lay down our lives for the weak. But God wants us to be his hands among the flock in our community. Not "hired hands". Nope. God wants volunteers who will step up on faith alone, just like David did, and say "Here am I. Send me!".

"Jesus, I thank you for being the greatest shepherd, giving your life to redeem mine. Give me faith like David's, that I might go out and defend your lambs from all the threats of evil around them, and lead them into greener pastures, to your side. Amen"

Friday, March 16, 2018

by: Juel Pierce

When I was in seminary, our Church History professor assigned for us to learn by heart the King James version of Psalm 23. The assignment was based not on church history, but for pastoral care. "Everyone knows this psalm," he said, "even if they don't know they know it. And you won't have to carry your Old and New Testament with Apocrypha with you if you have it in your mind and your heart."

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.

He leadeth me beside still waters.

He restoreth my soul.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I shall fear no evil, for thou art with me.

Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

Thou anointest my head with oil.

My cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

And he was right—at least for the generation of folks I ministered to as a pastor and a chaplain. I'm not sure younger generations, especially those not raised in church, would know it. But even those who don't can be comforted by the images and the cadences of this psalm. I used it many times when I was with people who were dying, and people who were very ill but wanted to get better. It's a psalm of the recognition of death, and of hope.

When Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd, there are many images that would have come to mind for his disciples and those who rejected him. King David was a shepherd whom God chose to lead the people (1 Samuel 16). Moses was a shepherd when he encountered God the I AM in the burning bush (Exodus 3). Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's charge that the leaders of the people were false shepherds who did not care for the sheep of Israel (Jeremiah 23 and Ezekiel 34). The true shepherd, in each case, was the Lord. So Jesus' claim to be the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep is a claim to be God.

As we follow Jesus on this road to Jerusalem, as we get closer to the end of Lent, we may be confronted not only with Jesus' coming death, but also with our own mortality. Of course, we began this journey being reminded that we are dust. But our journey does not end in the dust. Instead, it ends with the promise that we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Jesus reminds us that this promise is not only for us. He reminds us that he has other sheep that are not of this fold. They probably don't look like us, or speak our language, or even share our theology. But like us, they listen to his voice, and together with them we are one flock, following our good shepherd.

Jesus, Tender Shepherd, help us to listen for your voice and to follow where you lead, for only you know the path of Life. AMEN.

Saturday, March 17, 2018

by: Jeff Langdon

We are coming to closer to Holy Week... the week the Church remembers Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on Passion Sunday or Palm Sunday, the last supper on Maundy Thursday and the death of Jesus on the Cross on Good Friday. Yes, the death of Jesus!

But Jesus did not have to die.... do you realize that? When the crowd shouted, "He saved others, but he can't save himself", they were wrong. Jesus could have saved himself. Well before he was dragged before Herod and Pilot, well before he was beaten, well before he was sentenced to death, Jesus made one thing very clear, "No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord".

Jesus did not have to die... so why did he? Jesus' willful giving of his own life seems crazy to our selfish minds. I mean, sure, I would give my life for my wife, my kids, my grand-kids, but would I be so willing to take a death sentence for a person who killed one of my family members and showed no remorse or no sign of repentance. Jesus wasn't giving his life for a bunch of pretty good people who just needed a little extra help to get to heaven. Jesus died for a world that

hated him, who thought they could get to God on their own, a world who really wanted nothing to do with him.

Jesus did not have to die... but he wanted to! He wanted to because he is the Good Shepherd. He willingly faced the wolves because he loves us. He willingly died because in his death he could secure for us pleasant pastures and soothing waters in heaven. It defies reason, but God made it clear that God was pleased to save the world through such an outwardly foolish and simple truth. Your Good Shepherd died for your sins, and for my sins, and for our sins. He did not have to die, but he did! That is the gospel... that is the good news! That is really have we have to know. We have been made right with God because of our Good Shepherd!

Lord, you are the Good Shepherd. Supply our needs. Lead us to good pastures and still waters. Bring our wandering selves back to you. Lead us in paths of truth and grace. When we walk through the shadow of death, make your presence known to us. In the sight of all our foes, spread the great feast before us and invite us to the table. Bless us until our cups overflow so that we can reflect your love. Amen

Sunday, March 18, 2018

by: Pastor Roger Lenander

Then Joseph took the two boys...then he blessed them:

“The God before whom walked my fathers Abraham and Isaac,
The God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this very day,
The Angel who delivered me from every evil, bless the boys.

May my name be echoed in their lives, and the names of Abraham and Isaac, my fathers, and may they grow covering the Earth with their children.” Genesis 48:14-16 (Message)

In his dying moment Joseph prayed to the Lord for his children. He had lived a life in which he was betrayed by his brothers (in truth, he was an obnoxious little brother) and sold into slavery, sent to Egypt, and their God used his gifts and skills to save his brothers and the nations of the ancient world from starvation. Joseph spoke of God as his Shepherd; leading, providing, protecting him through all his days. And now at the end of his life he prays to his Shepherd to do the same for his descendants.

The God of Joseph sent Jesus as our Good Shepherd to save us from the power of sin, death, and the devil. Jesus is the Good Shepherd of those who have gone before us and those we will leave behind. He is our certain confidence and joy now and forever.

Lead us, Lord Jesus, through the new life in you that is ours now and forever. Amen.

Monday, March 19, 2018

by: Brenda Bass

Before my youngest nephew was born, my oldest nephew would talk to him while he was growing inside my sister! He would talk and sing to my sister's belly. I was blessed to be able to

be around my younger nephew right after he was born – and it was fascinating to me that when my older nephew would talk, my younger nephew would turn toward his voice! He recognized the voice – from before he was born!

Jesus tells us that one of his roles is that of a shepherd – to protect, to move, to ensure that the sheep find good pastures and then make their way back to the safety of the fold for the night. Jesus tells us that the sheep hear and recognize his voice – how do we know and recognize Jesus' voice?

God knows us before we are born – we are placed in a family, a community, a church, a supportive environment, to help us learn to recognize and respond to God's voice. We grow in faith as we worship, study, sing and fellowship together with other believers. We learn to hear God's voice through other believers, through reading scripture, through being in touch with the Spirit that is within each of us.

In this passage of Scripture from John, Jesus is reminding us that there are others outside of our fold who have not yet learned to hear God's voice. We are the ones who are to be reaching out to them, to nurture them, to support and protect them as they, too, learn to hear God's voice in their lives and thus, to turn their face and their lives over to the Good Shepherd!

Good and loving Shepherd, you have called us to be your followers. Give us strength, patience, and love to reach out to others who you are waiting for in your fold. Amen.

Tuesday, March 20, 2018

by: Jim Pierce

Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep The hired hand . . . sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away." (*John 10: 11-12*) Why? Well the hired hand doesn't own the sheep, doesn't have the same stake in them as the owner, doesn't care for the sheep in the same way the owner does.

In John 9 we read that Jesus healed a man born blind. Neighbors who knew this man all his life have trouble believing his story when he tells them how it happened. They bring him to the Pharisees who verbally attack the man and Jesus. How can Jesus, who doesn't observe the sabbath, who is obviously a sinner himself, perform such signs. When the man who received his sight responds, "I don't if he is a sinner or not. I only know that I was blind and now I see. You figure it out," they drive him out. Hearing this, Jesus finds the man and in conversation reveals himself to be the Son of Man." Turning to the Pharisees Jesus says, "if you were blind as well, I could excuse your behavior, but since you can see, you have no excuse. Your sin against this man and against God remains."

That story leads directly into Jesus saying, "I am the gate" which we reflected on last week, and "I am the good shepherd," the I AM name before us this week. It is easy to read these verses and think of many who are obviously the hired hand, abandoning the sheep at first sign of danger because they don't own the sheep, don't care. Jesus calls us on that thinking. It isn't other people Jesus calls the hired hands here. It is the Pharisees, the folks pouring their lives into the church, that Jesus is talking about. It's us. We're the hired hands.

In speaking of the good shepherd and hired hands, Jesus challenges us to look at how we act when someone like that formerly blind man comes to us with a story of healing. He challenges us to look at how we act when we see a sister or brother in need, in danger, crying for help. We want to believe we respond boldly, quick to affirm and help. In reality we know how often we run, just as the hired hand does when the wolf appears. In saying I am the good shepherd and not just a hired hand, Jesus rebukes the Pharisees and us.

But that's not where the story ends. In rebuking us, Jesus reminds us that we, too, are sheep in need of a shepherd, and then Jesus makes a promise, God's own promise. Jesus is not just other people's good shepherd. He is our good shepherd as well, and not just others and ours—he's the good shepherd of people we never heard of, who are not part of this fold, this flock. In laying down his life for the sheep, he lays it down for all. All includes them. It includes you and me. Whether we are running in fear from someone else's need or danger, or running in fear for our own lives, Jesus is with us and will not fail us. You can count on that.

Good Shepherd, thank you for watching over me and those I love. Thank you for watching over those I don't even know. Thank you for making us all part of your flock. Amen