**Written Copy For: Following the Good Shepherd-John 10:27-30**

4th Sunday of Easter

Sunday May 12th, 2019

**Text: John 10:27-30**

27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one."

**Exegetical Statement**

The Pharisees and the Jews (the term used by John to identify various factions and people in Judaism who opposed Jesus as the Messiah) surround Jesus who is in Jerusalem to celebrate Chanukah (the cleansing of the Temple and re-dedication after Antiochus IV desecrated it). They demand that He clearly and plainly tell them if He is the Messiah. He answers that He already has told them by what He has taught and the works He has done, all in the name of the Father. The problem is they do not believe because they are not one of His sheep and therefore are not members of His kingdom. His sheep know and respond to His voice and follow Him by faith. He knows who are His sheep. He gives them eternal life and so they will never perish or be snatched from His hand. The Father gave them to Him, and since no one is greater than the Father no one has the power snatch them out of the Father’s hands. Jesus and the Father are one-the One True God.

**Focus Statement:**

Our Good Shepherd’s love and protection for us never stops or weakens. He is the power behind the life given to the Mother’s child, and she is there in its life as His hands and feet. His death saves the child from all that would seek to harm it. His forgiveness knows no bounds, no matter how bad the child is or how far it’s strayed-He calls it back. The child rests safely in His hands from which no one can pluck it. The Good Shepherd is always my shepherd even when I grow old. He will guide me through even the darkest valley to the eternal pleasant pastures to come.

**Function Statement:**

**Why it’s important to know**:

A mother’s love and care for her child resembles the love and care described by the Good Shepherd analogy. But it falls short of it in the mother’s ability to protect/defend, call back the erring, and in the forgiveness offered and received. While mom will always be mom, the relationship changes and becomes less important as they grow, move away, and marry.

**What the hearer should do as a result**:

Wonder and give thanks to God for His gift of mothers. And even more so for His continuing job of protecting, guiding, and shepherding us, His undeserving but still much-loved sheep.

**Subject Sentence: The Greatness of our Shepherd’s Care**

The 4th Sunday of Easter is known as “Good Shepherd Sunday”. The readings and the hymns all focus on word picture of Jesus as our Good Shepherd. But as things fall this year this is also Mother’s Day, which would be pretty hard for me to ignore. (Not like how we sometimes ignore Father’s Day 😊. And I know that we have quite a few mothers in attendance, some with their daughters. Others of us are here remembering our mothers who have passed on before us. So, what I’d like to do this morning is look at how the love and care provided by our mothers resembles the love and care that is being described when we call Jesus our “Good Shepherd”. And to do that I want to walk through that well-known Good Shepherd Psalm #23.

**Psalm 23:1-2 1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.**

When the LORD is our Shepherd we are never in need. That is also the goal of our mother. From the moment we were born she began to provide us with the nourishment we needed. She began to address all the needs a baby has: the appropriate food, times of rest and sleep. And that most fun of jobs, changing diapers; and then the rush to get that child potty trained. She made sure we had warm clothes to wear, maybe not the newest or the best, but as adequate as she could afford. And she kept them clean despite our attempts to bring home all the dirt in the neighborhood on them. She worked to provide a nurturing household, green pastures and quiet waters where we could grow in health and safety. She didn’t provide all the things we wanted, but provided the things we truly needed. She did this as the hands and feet of our Good Shepherd who placed you with your mother whom he chose to nurture and care for you. All the things she provided came from His hands. He gave to us those lush green pastures and nourishing waters out of His love for you as communicated through your mom.

**Psalm 23:3 He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.**

Our mothers worked hard to guide us down paths of obedience; obedience to the 10 commandments so that we might live in fear of God and in love toward one another. She taught us to have love and respect for others by first making us love and respect her by obeying what she told us to do. And if we didn’t then we learned what happens to those in the world who make wrong choices and do wrong actions: bad things happen. She allowed some, but not all of the consequences of our disobedience to fall on us so that we would learn doing the wrong thing hurts; hurts us as well as those around us. She was once again teaching us as Jesus, our Good Shepherd’s hands and feet to follow the paths of righteousness, because that’s how we live as Christians-those who carry His name.

But she also brought to the presence of The Good Shepherd in His holy house, to be taught by His Word as it is read, sung, and spoken, Our Good Shepherd used that word to chastise us when we chose to listen to our own selfish hearts instead of to Him. But as our hearts were broken, He shared His love through His words of forgiveness. She brought us here to be washed clean in the waters of baptism so that we would forever be marked as the sheep of the Good Shepherd’s flock. In Baptism we were given the Spirit of the Good Shepherd who worked in us whether we were here in His house or out in the world to constantly restore our soul through the ongoing washing and regeneration of our Baptism. She brought us here so that our Good Shepherd could wash all our sins away and make us clean again. He always had with Him the Good Shepherd’s rod and staff: the staff of His Word planted in our hearts to keep us on those righteous paths and the rod to beat back the temptation arising in our own sinful hearts as well as the devil and his demons who are always prowling like lions looking for unprotected souls to devour. Our mothers protected us from what they could, and entrusted us into the care of The Good Shepherd for those things she could not protect us from.

**Psalm 23:4** **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.**

While our mother is always our mother, there comes a time when we leave her tender care and head out on our own. When the apron strings are cut and she transitions into more of an advisory role than a direct shepherding role. We grow up and move away to go to college, and then to begin work in our careers. And as God’s Word tells us in **Genesis 2:24** **Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh**.” I know a lot about how that works. 😊 It is at this time our mothers most fervently entrusted us into the hands of The Good Shepherd. Because no matter how far we may travel from our mother’s house as His much-loved sheep we always remain in His care, in His sheepfold. He leads us through all the paths we need to take in this life as we start our own family and become mothers and fathers. And there are those times when we find our way leads through some dark valleys. Sometimes we head into them because of wrong choices we’ve made. Other times they come as an unfortunate part of this sinful broken world. They are the dark valleys of depression, loss of job, loss of health, loss of loved one. They can be the dark valleys of alcoholism and drug abuse. They can be the dark valleys of marital problems and infidelity. As much as our mothers might want to help us through these valleys the only one who truly can is our Good Shepherd. Just because the valley gets dark and foreboding doesn’t mean He has left us. He promises never to leave us or forsake us. Instead by faith we know He is there walking with us, sometimes carrying us. He doesn’t always restore those things that are lost or completely fix all that is wrong to our liking. But He does lead us through these dark valleys by the light and leading of His Word. He promises to bring us out the other side. The devil likes to yell at us during these times that the darkness will last forever. But that is a lie. Even in the darkest of valleys our Good Shepherd remains our light and our hope. And when that dark valley leads to your death, He and His angels are there to welcome you into His arms, there to await a must brighter future to come.

**Psalm 23:5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.**

As part of His care for us even in the darkest of times our Good Shepherd prepares a table for us, the banquet that is His body and His blood given for you, to forgive your sins, to forgive those wrong choices and turns that lead us into dark valleys. We needn’t care that our enemies surround us, the world that tries to lure us away from our Shepherd, our worries and problems that test our faith. This banquet is for those times. To restore our faith. To bring us the comfort that only His true presence can. In this meal He anoints our head with oil: a sign of special welcome and festive joy. It doesn’t matter what the world may try to throw at us, we are communing all together in a very personal way with our Shepherd who tells us in **John 16:33b** **“In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.**" No matter what is going on in your life this is your victory celebration with your Good Shepherd who reminds you of that victory that He won for you. He went to the cross and shed His blood so that you could be forgiven for all the times you’ve wandered down wrong paths and tried to run away from Him. He went after you, drew from you all your sinful disobedience, and removed it from you on the cross. His body broken for you, so that yours never would have to suffer what your disobedience earned. His blood shed for you, to wash you clean. To make you His precious Lamb. In this meal He reminds you of all these things and restores your faith in His promises. Surly at this banqueting table, which is just the foretaste of the feast to come in eternal life our cup overflows with His love.

Our Good Shepherd is with us to lead us this day. Just as Moses: God’s shepherd of His Old Testament people led them for 40 years through the wilderness, so too is Jesus our Good Shepherd leading us through the wilderness of this world. Although He provides pleasant pastures here, this world is not our destination. We walk through this world because as our Good Shepherd said in **John 10:16** “**And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd**. He uses us to be His voice calling out through His Gospel message to those Lambs who are alone in this wilderness and defenseless, in danger of being lost forever. Through the power of the Spirit of the Shepherd working through that Gospel message these lost sheep are called into the Good Shepherd’s fold just as You and I were. And our Shepherd promises in **John 10:27-29** 27 **My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me**. 28 **I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand**. 29 **My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand**. Once these sheep are called into the Good Shepherd’s sheepfold and placed into His hand, no one can snatch them away.

And so, He leads us all through this wilderness to the Promised Land to come. To an abundant pasture, the likes of which we have never seen and can only imagine. It’s the place the Apostle John describes in his vision recorded in **Revelation 7:15-17** “**15 "Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. 16 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. 17 For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.** In this abundant pasture to come there will be no more of any of those things that afflict us. No more thirsting for that which we need, or even desire but cannot have, no more hunger and lack, no more pain and suffering, no more tears. Life, abundant life. With abundant access to springs of living water that refresh both body and soul forever.

**Psalm 23:6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.**

That abundant pasture is our end goal, the place where we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Through our Good Shepherds gifts good gifts of mercy, forgiveness, and restoration found in the Word and Sacraments He leads us this day and every day. And as His precious Lamb you have this certain promise that you will dwell in the house of the LORD forever. He is calling you through His word today, through this very word I am preaching to you. It is His voice calling out to you, and giving you the power of faith to believe, to hold fast to Jesus as your Good Shepherd who will lead you through this life to life everlasting. And there you and I will rejoice and celebrate with our mothers who have gone on ahead of us, as well as those who are here with us now. Those who have been in the care of the Good Shepherd themselves, being led as we are to that glorious eternal pasture to come. Amen.