

Written Copy: John 10:14-18 “You Are Jesus’ Little Lamb”

4th Sunday of Easter

Sunday, April 21st, 2024

Text: John 10:14-18

¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. 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. ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

The text’s intent

To present Jesus as the LORD, who is the Good Shepherd who came to save His flock from being snatched away from the Father by the devil who works through the voice of the world, and by speaking to our own sinful heart that we need no shepherd, we can walk in our own paths. And when we fall into sin, whisper to us that we cannot and will not be forgiven. But the Good Shepherd is the voice we are to listen to who calls us to Himself, and points to His laying down His life for us and picking it up again as the proof we are not cast away but remain His precious sheep. His Spirit walks with us now leading us down paths or righteousness, protecting us from the devil’s voice even as we walk through the dark valleys of struggle, strife, and mourning so that we arrive on Resurrection Day ready to spend eternity in the perfect pasture of eternal life.

Focus Statement:

Jesus is the LORD God who is our Good Shepherd. He calls us by faith given in baptism into His sheepfold, the Church. He speaks to us through Word and Sacrament, telling us He laid down His life and took it up again to save us from being snatched away by the voice of the devil, the world, and our own sinful hearts. He did this out of the greatest love for us. He sent His Spirit who keeps us focused on His voice alone, and guides us through all the dark valleys of this world so that we will be welcomed into the perfect pasture of eternal life.

Function Statement:

Why it’s important to know:

We listen to the voice of the devil speaking to us through the world, through false teachers, and into our own sinful hearts that we don’t need a shepherd. And then when we wander into a dark valley, make us think we are all alone, abandoned, unloved, and cannot be forgiven.

What the hearer should do as a result:

In repentance turn away from those other voices and hold fast to the voice of our Good Shepherd. Be the means that His voice speaks comfort and hope to our fellow sheep, and those in the world He would call through us.

Subject Sentence: Sheep Who Hold Fast to the Good Shepherd’s Voice

Introduction

“I am Jesus’ little lamb, ever glad at heart I am.” It’s a Lamb of God favorite hymn. And for many of us it puts a smile on our faces. If you’re like me, you think of this hymn being sung by children; you can easily hear them singing these verses, can’t you? (*Play a sample*). We often think of it as a Children’s Hymn. In fact, some think that while it’s cute, it doesn’t rank in importance up there with a hymn like “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” Maybe that’s because some think it to be a little naïve. It’s okay for kids, but a little too simple for us lifelong adult Christians.

Do you see yourselves as “Jesus little lamb”? Do you see Jesus as your Good Shepherd? Perhaps your head is saying yes; but what about your heart? In my life there certainly are times when I cry out to Jesus to be that Good Shepherd who provides and cares for me. But if we all are honest, there are other times when we have a different shepherd for our lives. Who might those be?

Our Other Shepherds and Hired Hands’ voices

Well first of all, why is it that we look to a different shepherd? Jesus tells us the sheep listen to the Shepherd’s voice. When might we stop listening to the voice of the Good Shepherd and instead listen to other voices?

In our Gospel Lesson Jesus talks about hired hands who really don’t care about the sheep, but are in it for themselves. In context of this passage Jesus was referring to the chief priests, the Pharisees and Sadducees, the Scribes, and Elders, the religious leaders of the day who were supposed to shepherd God’s flock for Him. Instead they were more interested in elevating themselves and convincing the people they needed to keep the law just like they did to be right with God. Because the people listened to these leaders, it caused God’s flock to be scattered by leaving behind God’s work of grace through the sacrificial system as His gift to bestow forgiveness and right standing with Him.

Who might these hired hands be today? The voices of culture that elevate prominent people to positions of status, those that the world looks to for answers to the problems of life; people like politicians and political parties, entertainers and sports heroes. We sometimes listen to these voices and look to these people too for the problems that plague our country and the world. We might concede Jesus is there for the spiritual things, but for the real and concrete everyday stuff we look elsewhere.

Today's hired hands would also be those leaders and preachers within the Church who preach a feel-good message that has more to do with pop psychology than the Bible. Those who preach the gospel of "Name It and Claim It" One of the best example of this is Joel Osteen who preaches this kind of message in his book "Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential" In it He says, "***Our beliefs will prove either a barrier or vehicle as we strive to go higher***" In other words positive thinking is the answer to success and living to the full potential of what you want life to be. And there's this one: "I Declare: 31 Promises to Speak Over Your Life" where he writes that you can "***speak favor over your life***". If you name it, and claim it, God will make it happen. Makes me feel sorry that the Apostle Paul didn't have these books available when he was suffering through his ministry to the Church, or even Luther as he was threatened by the Pope.

All these things sound good on the good days of our life. But what about when we stumble into one of those dark valleys? What about when personal tragedy strikes us or our loved ones in the form the loss of something or someone precious to us, a health crisis, sickness, cancer, or death? You certainly can declare promises that are pulled out of the Bible, but how far does **your** declaring it go? What happens when what you're declaring doesn't come to pass, when the sickness, loss, or tragedy remains? When it's up to me to declare the proper passage for my "best life now" in order for it to kick in, who is really the shepherd of my life?

Who is behind all these voices? Who is that wolf that is seeking to scatter the flock? It's the devil himself. He doesn't come running at you to attack you in a physical form that you could fend off. He speaks through the voice of culture. He whispers into your ear what he knows your sinful heart wants to hear: that you can be the shepherd of your life. You don't need to be anybody's little lamb. You should take control. You have the knowledge, the intelligence, the know-how, the money to handle most things.

Besides, following too closely to the paths that Jesus the Shepherd tells us to go down is really hard. Put others first before myself? Love and forgive others, even those I don't feel deserve forgiveness? Give sacrificially of my time, talents, and treasures, even to those that I don't feel are deserving of them? I don't want to go down those paths in this life. That wolf- the devil - encourages me to listen to my own heart's desire and be the shepherd of my own life. In this he is encouraging me to turn away and be scattered from the Good Shepherd who called me to be a member of His flock.

And what happens when those paths I choose prove to be a dead end? What happens when I'm in that dark valley of suffering and worry and despair? The wolf is there to whisper in my ear how disappointed God is with me. He says, "**God is so angry with you! Do you really think He's gonna forgive you for that? Do you really think He cares about you? If He did, wouldn't He do something about the trouble you're in? Wouldn't He make all those things you're declaring come true? You're on your own!**" Whether it's in the good and pleasant pastures or in the dark valleys, he comes with his lies to encourage you to turn away from the Good Shepherd and fend for yourself. He does this because if He can move you to give up your faith, he can snatch you and take you to his lair which is eternal suffering in hell.

Listening to the Voice of the Good Shepherd

John 10:14-15 ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.

We have a better voice to listen to. The voice of our Good Shepherd. Who is this Good Shepherd? Jesus who says, "I AM". There are 14 times in John's Gospel where Jesus uses the phrase "I AM". If you were to translate that into Hebrew you would have the word "Yahweh": or word that we translate as LORD, meaning the Triune God. Our Good Shepherd is not just a man, He is the LORD God Himself. And His voice is the voice of God who not only declares truth but makes it happen in our lives. This is a power the devil does not have.

He knows us. He knows you. He knows all the ways you are tempted to replace Him with other shepherds, including yourself. He knows how you struggle to live according to His commands, to follow down those paths of righteousness that tells you to love Him and others by making them more important than yourself. He knows the trouble you get yourself into. He knows the desperation and fear that can consume any of us in those dark valleys. That's why He came, to call you and I back to Him and by faith declare Himself to once again be your Good Shepherd. He came to defeat the voice of the devil and your own sinful heart by laying down His life. And He did that for me and for you, and for all.

He did that when He laid down His life to save you from being snatched away and lost forever. He took the punishment for all the ways and times you and I take control of our lives and live them to please ourselves, He took the punishment for all the ways you love yourself more than Him or others. He took the punishment for the times when you live as if you are the shepherd, the god of your life. He took all that and laid down His life in your place when He suffered and died on the cross. John declares this about your Good Shepherd in **1 John 3:16 ⁶ By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us.** He did this for you and for me as the greatest gift of love anyone could ever give us.

John 10:18 ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

He is the LORD, the Good Shepherd, who declares that not only did He lay down His life for you, but that He didn't stay dead. He took that life back up on the 3rd day. He rose again from death to everlasting life. He did this because He is the Good Shepherd who lives now and forever more to care for you and guide you through your life in this fallen world.

There is a term in shepherding called the “Bummer Sheep”. This is used to describe a lamb that for some reason is rejected at birth by its mother. She will refuse to feed it, shove it off to the side away from her. Sometimes she will even try to smother it. The shepherd is on the lookout for such a little lamb, who is often crying and alone, by itself. The shepherd will take it up into his arms and care for it. He will feed it using a bottle filled with the mother's milk. He will protect it from harm from its mother and other sheep. Many times, the shepherd is able to perform an adoption with another sheep who has given birth, especially to a mother who had a lamb that was still born. The shepherd smears that mother's scent all over the Bummer Lamb making it smell like her. And then he watches to make sure she accepts it and adopts it as her own.

When you and I make ourselves or something else the shepherd of our lives, when we succumb to the voice of the wolf who is the devil, we end up spiritually like the Bummer Lamb. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who comes alongside us and takes us up into His arms. He comforts us and feeds us with His Word and Sacrament. He declares us to be forgiven of our sin and points us to His sacrifice on our behalf to show us how much He loves us. He adopts us into His sheepfold, His Church, His congregation assembled here to worship and serve Him. Here through the means of grace He provides those pleasant pastures and still waters that restore us body and soul. He declares Himself once again to be our Good Shepherd who promises to lead us through all the dark valleys so that we will all assemble together with Him and live forever in that perfect pasture of eternal life.

Conclusion

Let's turn back to our sermon hymn, only now apply it to yourself personally. "You are Jesus little lamb. Ever glad at heart I am, and you are. That's because your Good Shepherd gently guides you, knows your needs and well supplies you. Loves you every day the same", loving you more than anyone else in this world does. He loves you sacrificially and unconditionally. "He even calls you by your name". He is concerned with all His lambs; He is concerned about you personally. He forgives you when you try to replace Him with another shepherd. Through the faith He gave you in your baptism, and working through the law and the Gospel, He restores you to Himself when the devil tries to scatter you. "When you hunger body and soul, Jesus feeds you. Into pleasant pastures leads you. And when your short life is ended, by His angel host attended, He gently folds you to His breast". And from there He will, on Resurrection Day, restore you body and soul to live in His perfect pasture of eternal life, along with all of His flock that He has gathered throughout the history of the world. May He remain your Good Shepherd and you His precious little lamb, now and forever more. Amen.