

April 17 2016

Scripture Lessons

Psalm 23

Revelation 7:9-17

John 10:11-18

Sermon *There are Shepherds, and Then There Are “Shepherds”*

In today’s Gospel lesson Jesus was talking with the disciples using the imagery of the shepherds and the sheep and the sheepfold and we are told in verse 6 prior to the beginning of today’s lesson and surprise, surprise, they did not understand what he was saying to them. And not only was that true that the disciples didn’t understand and I think that is equally true of many of us in our modern world today. I think it is necessary to understand what Jesus is saying not from a sentimental point of view but honestly and clearly so we can appreciate the imagery in all its richness and in its proper context. Jesus starts by telling us, this was not a surprise to me, that there are different kinds of shepherds that you are going to encounter in life. There are good shepherds and there are bad shepherds. There are faithful shepherds and there are unfaithful shepherds and he makes it perfectly clear that he is a good and faithful shepherd.

Now it is expected of course that the shepherd will take care of the flock. The owners of the sheep hire shepherds in order that the sheep under their care and protection will be safe. If something happened to one or more of the sheep, the shepherd was expected to somehow show proof that the shepherd was not derelict in his duty. In the Luke’s Gospel verse 15, for example, Jesus told several parables about different kinds of losses of sheep and one was about a shepherd who had a hundred sheep in his charge and the shepherd lost just one but he makes a sacrifice. He leaves the ninety-nine and goes in search for that one lost sheep until that sheep is found. He then rejoices and he calls his friends and neighbors to celebrate with him. What also separates the good shepherd from the bad was the fact there were hazards and dangers out there and there were also animals that had to be contended with. So we are told that sometimes the shepherd had to battle with them and the good shepherd stayed and stood tall. In first Samuel 17 soon to be King David mentions to King Saul that when he was taking care of his father’s sheep he had to often battle with lions and had to battle with bears in the process of protecting the sheep.

Grandfather story: My grandfather learned all these lessons of shepherding in later years after he retired, really the hard way. When he thought that it would be this really neat thing to buy three or four sheep as a hobby in his retirement and graze them on his pasture land in Moscow, Idaho. Several times a day however guess what

happened, we found ourselves chasing the sheep down the road after they had jumped the fence. Grandfather tried everything; he tried to make the fences taller; he tried to tie weights around the sheep's necks or almost anything that he could think of to get them to stay in the sheepfold where they were safe. So in less than a month the sheep went back to where they came from and grandpa was out of the sheep business for good and thank goodness I didn't have to run down the road any more.

Jesus further said "As a good shepherd, I laid down my life that I may take it back up again. Nobody takes my life from me but I lay it down and I have the power to take it up back up again. And this charge I have received from God." I can confess to you that suffering and sacrifice are not immediate choice of directing the way I live my life and I am sure that is true for most of us here in this room. Yet this is exactly the kind of life that Jesus chooses to live. It was gift freely given by Jesus to each one of us that we might know how much that God truly cares and loves us. This is the gift that we certainly did not earn and yet Jesus did it for us surely, surely out of love. Jesus as the Good Shepherd choose to heed God's will of his life; being a child of God will only be possible for us ,I believe as followers of Jesus when we are willing to give of ourselves to others around us and to seek after God's will in our lives as well. It is not our will that we pray in the course of this life but that God's will will be done on earth as we live out our lives day by day.

You know Jesus recognized throughout his ministry that there was always the possibility of the cross. I am sure he hoped that supreme sacrifice would be never, never be necessary. No doubt in his mind that he knew that if he died, death would not be the end. He had complete faith; he had complete trust in God when it came to this ultimate destiny. Jesus also makes it abundantly clear that it is his choice to lay down his life. God had neither demanded it nor had God forced this choice upon Jesus. He chooses the course that he would follow by accepting the cross. He did so voluntarily, he did so without reservation, he did so without hesitation, he did so because that is the pathway that he chooses.

William Barkley famous commentator which I have quoted on his commendatory of the gospel of John before, he told an interesting story about a young man young French soldier who was seriously wounded during the First World War. His arm was so badly mangled that the doctor had to amputate his arm. Here this poor man was in flower of his youth, and was magnificent example of young adult hood. It bothered the surgeon to no end that the young soldier would have to go through the rest of his life without his arm. It came to the end of the time when the man awoke, he found the surgeon right there beside his bed. The doctor wanted desperately to be the first person to tell him the bad news when he regained his consciousness the doctor said these words "I am so sorry to tell you that you have lost your arm". And the young man replied" Sir, I did not lose my arm, I gave up my arm freely for friends" and

likewise Jesus did not lose his life but willingly gave it up, he gave it up for you, he gave it up for me, and he gave it up for all humanity and that he did willingly, he would do it again, I am convinced he did that we might know of God's love and the assurance of eternal life. Because of this selfless act of being the Good Shepherd, acting like the owner, not just as hired hand, we know that we who live in Jesus' flock have absolute nothing to fear. We, also, know that if we live this kind of life on behalf of others, giving back something that is larger than ourselves, we can help to provide the same kind of safety, the same kind of warmth, and the same kind of life that others around us so desperately need. We need to live with grace, to live with hope, and to live with peace. And together we say AMEN.