

Who Is Shepherding You?



In all the years of my life (which I am not revealing here), there has never been a time like this before when Christians have been confronted - because of the government, employment, social media, school policy or the culture - to either take a bold stand for your faith or acquiesce to the ramifications of the actions being taken by our superiors. Daily we are being confronted by a culture that considers the authority of Scripture and the One True God as hate speech and the walk of the Christian faith as lacking tolerance, love and

compassion. I would suggest, along with the Scripture texts for this coming Sunday, that there has never been a more important time to resolve the question, **“Who is shepherding me?”**

As many Sunday school teachers do, Miss Johnson pulled together her young students so they could prepare to memorize Psalm 23. She approached the pastor wanting to have the students present their memory work to the whole congregation on Sunday morning a month from that date. Little Bobby was initially excited about the memorization and being able to recite his part before the church. He wanted to invite his grandparents to watch him do it. Unfortunately, Bobby froze when it came to memorizing just about anything. He tried and tried. His parents helped him, but he just couldn't remember the psalm. After a month of practice, he could not remember any more than “The Lord is my Shepherd.” That fateful Sunday arrived. The small class walked single file up to the front of the church. All were smiling except for Bobby. He was petrified. Bobby was the first to recite the psalm before the church but by then his nerves made his entire mind go blank. The teacher crouched down in front of him and held the microphone to his face. Bobby suddenly smiled and said, **“The Lord is my Shepherd and that's all I need to know.”**

Truly, little Bobby was right. The Lord is our Shepherd and once we understand that relationship to our God, to the Risen Christ, then we have a true operational basis for our faith and life. In the Gospel reading, John 10:11-18, Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd. In the group listening to Him, everyone would understand that imagery. Once again, Jesus started with something they knew and then moved on to applying a spiritual point for our daily lives to it. It was important that they understood that he was THE Good Shepherd. Why? Because, very simply, there were some bad ones.

A bad shepherd, often termed a hireling, would at times be hired to watch the sheep. When a wild animal, a wolf, or a lion as in the case of David in the Old Testament, would come along to have themselves a bit of a mutton dinner, the hireling would run. The hireling was hired to protect the sheep but to this bad shepherd that didn't go so far as to go face to face with a wild beast. How completely the opposite of this is the shepherd in the Parable of the Lost Sheep that Jesus told in Matthew 18:12-13. “What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the 99 on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds

it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the 99 that did not wander off.” That is how the Good Shepherd was portrayed.

You may remember the story from 1 Samuel of David’s trip to take his brothers food when he saw Goliath taunting the Jewish soldiers. King Saul was shocked when David offered to fight the giant. David’s only training had been as a shepherd. What did he know about fighting giants? In his answer we see, once again, the spirit of a Good Shepherd. “But David said to Saul, ‘Your servant has been keeping his father’s sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it, and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it, and killed it. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. The Lord who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine” (1 Samuel 17:34-37).

A good shepherd protects his sheep. The disciples were well acquainted with the role of a shepherd. They also would have remembered the parable of the lost sheep and certainly this story of David was told to them as children. A good shepherd, they would know, protects his sheep. When Jesus told them He was the Good Shepherd, He added that He was the kind of good shepherd that would lay down His life for His sheep and take it up again. Only this Shepherd could claim to be the perfect Paschal Lamb Himself, the One who lays down His life as a sacrifice for all sin and the One who has conquered death with His victorious resurrection. If attacked by a lion or a bear, our Good Shepherd would not run, not give up protection even if it was a battle to the death.

Jesus was the kind of shepherd who would lay down his life for the sheep. When Jesus told them this truth, the disciples did not understand the prophetic nature of His comments. For at that time Jesus was marching toward the cross to do exactly what the Good Shepherd promised them He would do. He was going to lay down His life for the sheep. There is no sign that any of them understood at that time that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, would offer Himself up as the Passover lamb for the forgiveness of our sin. I don’t believe they understood that, but it was certainly easy to grasp that Jesus promised to be their Good Shepherd.

Not only does the Good Shepherd protect His sheep but He also said, “I am the Good Shepherd; I know My sheep and My sheep know Me.” That is certainly a hard thought to process. Jesus said He knew his sheep. How is that possible? With around eight billion people in the world, God promises to know me, to know you, to know every one - and know our individual thoughts, hopes, plans, pains, and our sorrows. Instead of looking at this as a wonderful and hopeful thing, we all, at times, feel so insignificant. We can’t fathom a God who is aware of our struggles, our loneliness, our grief, or our losses. Therefore, we tend to imagine God to be more like us. This thinking leads to the misconceptions and fallacies of our current culture.

Jesus revealed to us in His Word in no uncertain terms that God knows us, each one of us. In Jeremiah 29:11, the Lord tells us, “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” Not only does the Good Shepherd protect and know us personally, but He does

have a plan for our eternal lives. We are not insignificant to God. You matter to God. You belong to His flock.

On the flip side, our Scripture readings reveal that His sheep know His voice. We need the relationship with the Good Shepherd created through Baptism and the gift of faith and nurtured through His Word and Sacrament. We know that Christ laid down His life for His flock and took it up again to be our Good Shepherd 24/7. Only He changes the darkness of death to be but a shadow with the truth of death and grave conquered with the light of His salvation. We also know that the Good Shepherd would leave the flock to search for a lost sheep. Are you one of the lost sheep? Have you wandered away from the flock? Are you struggling to hear His voice? What about those around you - your family, your workplace, your neighborhood - are they struggling with who is leading them in this complex world?

This is also what it means that He is the Good Shepherd—not only that He is infinite in power, unstoppable in death, and able to deliver, but also that this mighty, living Savior, who knew our sin before we were conceived, willingly laid down His life for such timid, sinful sheep as you and I are. Do you resemble some of them? The sheep who question, “Did God really say?” when we want something or want to believe something contrary to His will and ways. Or sheep like Cain who didn’t value the life of every living soul, even his own family. Or sheep like Jonah who wanted grace for himself but ran from God as He sought to share His grace and mercy with the Ninevites. Or sheep like David who filled his heart with adultery and murder rather than the things of God. Or sheep that sit in the seat of scoffers (today’s culture) rather than being rooted in the living stream of God’s authoritative truth. Or sheep like the Pharisees who judged others by their self-righteous hearts. Or sheep like Judas who traded his relationship with Jesus for the currency of this world and then decided to choose death rather than the abundant life Jesus freely gives. Or sheep like Peter who, in the heat of the moment, denied even knowing the Jesus he earlier confessed. Or even John who wanted a preeminent throne at Christ’s right hand until Good Friday, when the thrones turned out to be crosses. Then, in fear, John locked himself away with the other sheep, despite the Lord’s Word that death could not contain Him. There are many other examples of Jesus’ flock in Scripture. **Do you resemble any of them?** But this is who Jesus is for each of us: the Good Shepherd who loves the sheep, who pursues the sheep, who lays down His life for His sheep, who takes up His life again to lead the sheep—blemished sheep like you and like me.

How does one follow just one shepherd? Only one shepherd, the Good Shepherd, has laid down His life for you and taken it up again to navigate you through this life and into eternity. Through the life, death and resurrection of this Good Shepherd, ALL that you have done is forgiven; all that Satan has done is defeated; all that He has done for YOU results in eternal life in His name. How do you stop the witness of Easter sheep who follow the Risen Good Shepherd? Easter sheep who know that they do not live lives that end in death but die deaths that end with life - life eternal? Sheep like Peter and John say, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, **for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard**” (Acts 4:19–20).

Evangelism in this day and time is fraught with fear and anxiety. But one way to confront this in our hearts is to resolve to answer the question, "Who is shepherding me?" with the bold answer of sheep like little Bobby: **"The Lord is my Shepherd and that's all I need to know."** As sinner/saint sheep, it's quite natural to be both anxious and encouraged. But it's also easy to feel ashamed of how sheepish we are when such ground for boldness is ours in Christ. The resurrected Good Shepherd is at our side, and yet we go through life as nervous and shifty eyed as a lone lamb in the woods, worrying away our days. The very Vanquisher of death has declared Himself through Baptism to be, for you, for me, *our* Deliverer, yet the very mention of a civil suit, cancer or stroke, or financial trouble can make us tremble.

How can this be? There's also the presence of persecution. It's no longer IF you will face it but when. But in the face of opposition - those judging you with hate speech for speaking the truth of God's Word, those accusing you of being un-Christian because you confess that Jesus doesn't tolerate sin or sinful behavior but rather He died to redeem people from it, those forsaking you as they did Jesus because His truth is not of this sinful world - in the face of all this, simply confess: **"The Lord is my Shepherd and that's all I need to know."**

All the current resources provided by our Synod through the English District are simply to equip you to boldly confess - not just during worship - but out in the world WHERE YOU LIVE AND MOVE AND HAVE YOUR BEING - that there is one flock, one Shepherd - Jesus, your risen and ascended Savior. Ask your pastor to offer a class of "Every One His Witness" and its many modules of witnessing to various people groups. Ask him to investigate Re:Vitality for your church family. Contact any one of us through the Evangelization Team email: 1evangelizationteam@englishdistrict.org We would love to hear from you or your church on how you are following the Good Shepherd and letting the world know: **"The Lord is my Shepherd and that's all I need to know."** Let the Good Shepherd lead you as you navigate through the peaks and valleys of daily life. And through those really tough times, ask Him to carry you on His shoulders. You have never been loved like YOU ARE loved by the Good Shepherd. Enjoy following and witnessing for the Good Shepherd this week and always!

In Christ Alone,
Pastor John Diener
Galatians 2:20