

### **“I’m Glad He’s My Shepherd”**

What does it mean to have a shepherd? Interesting question.

This is Good Shepherd Sunday – always happens on the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter. Jesus is risen. Jesus is alive. Jesus fulfills Psalm 23 in a very real way.

The gospel lesson is from John chapter 10. There are several readings here of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. This is a conversation Jesus had with the people on Temple Mount the December before He came back to Jerusalem to die. It was Hanukah.

Word about Jesus had gotten around. Was He the Christ? They were on the east side of the plaza, across from the entrance to the temple. This is an interesting conversation, because it demonstrates the dramatic listening difference between those who want to understand and those who don't. The title this morning is, "I'm glad He's My Shepherd!" These people weren't. So they ask.

"How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus' answer is astute. He knew that in many different ways He *had* told them He was the Christ, but in many different ways they had chosen to pay no attention to what He was doing and what He was saying. In fact, from the beginning of Jesus' ministry, there was the challenge of the religious leaders virtually every time He had something to say, or anytime He did a miracle.

So Jesus says, "I did tell you, but you do not believe." This is the context for Jesus to talk about Himself as the Good Shepherd, and about the characteristics of His sheep. The first characteristic is that His sheep listen to Him.

Think about it. Think about the world today. Think about how this is still the same. The difference is that Jesus is not in Solomon's Colonnade, and the skeptics are not the people in Jerusalem. Today Jesus is known all over the world, and the skeptics are all the people in the world who do not believe. "I did tell you, but you do not believe." Jesus simply is not the shepherd of those who do not believe, because there is no basis for a relationship.

I'm glad that He's my Shepherd!

The relationship is eternal. "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life . . ." Jesus gives me eternal life. Jesus gives believers eternal life. Wonderful!

What is it like? Heaven. During this Easter season the 1<sup>st</sup> lessons are from the book of Revelation. This morning, from chapter 7. After having some spectacular views of the throne of God, and an encounter with the elders in heaven, John looked ". . . and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count . . . They were wearing white robes . . . and they cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.'"

"Who are they?" Well these are the believers, the sheep of the Good Shepherd, and indeed no one plucked them out of the hand of the Lord, for here they are enjoying eternal life. This is a promise kept.

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, did all that was necessary, He does all that is necessary that His sheep then and His sheep now have eternal life. Easter is 7 Sundays long to help us fully

appreciate all that He has done –His suffering and death are over, He is come from the grave, He made Himself and makes Himself known.

As people believe, they understand that in the words of the elder in heaven, "they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Salvation!

Then there's a marvelous description of all the positive that is the inheritance of those in heaven, and then words that reflect Jesus' words in the colonnade that day in Jerusalem, and words that are reminiscent of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. Once again, Scripture hangs together so well! "For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." I'm glad He's my Shepherd.

O.K., let's move forward with 1 Peter. This week chapter 2. After assuring those who believe that their trip through life, although it is beset with trials, will reach salvation, "the goal of your faith," Peter goes on to encourage them in their lives right now while still living on earth, in Phoenix, in 2007. So what is the encouragement?

Well – in part it's our identity as the Body of Christ, our relationship with Christ and with one another. 1 Peter 2:9 is well-known, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God;" So that's who we are.

Now the question is, "What are we going to do about it?"

First of all, we love Jesus. "Now to you who believe, this stone [i.e. Jesus] is precious." Jesus is the Good Shepherd, and that means not only is there care for us, but He is the object of our desire.

Last week we talked about what is needed to have spiritual growth. One way to look at that need is to recognize our call to prayer, study, and contemplation. As the Good Shepherd cares for us, disciplines us, and teaches us, we are to receive His care, discipline, and instruction for the good of life. And the good of the lives of others.

And so Peter says that we are chosen people for a reason: ". . . that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." People – we have an assignment. Each of us needs to determine how to do it, but we are called to praise the Lord in the presence of others whenever we have an opportunity. The opportunities do come along. Watch for them – they aren't always obvious. You *can* do this!

Then let's close with a few thoughts from Palms 23 on Jesus being the Good Shepherd. What does this mean?

First of all it means green pastures and quiet waters. But I know what you're thinking. "Pastor – the pastures aren't always green and the water is not always quiet." My response? Concentrating on the love, the care . . . and the peace and joy of the Good Shepherd, the pastures that are can be seen as green, and in a very real way, the waters are quiet. Pray, study, and contemplate that understanding.

And I want to say something about the rod and the staff. Same idea! Two pieces of shepherding equipment. The rod is for discipline. Don't go there – you might get a tap to get your attention. The staff is for care – you did go there and are in trouble, now you will gently be pulled back to where you need to be.

The Good Shepherd is with us throughout life, green pastures and quiet waters, giving the goodness and mercy that will follow us all the days of our lives, anointing our heads with oil, and then finally leading us through the valley of death. And then . . .

"I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."  
May that be your final destination, and mine. I'm glad He's my shepherd, I hope you are  
too!