

John 10:22-30

Sermon Easter 4, Good Shepherd Sunday, and Mother's day

Grace, peace, and mercy from God our father and our Lord Jesus Christ...Amen

About eight and a half years ago Liz dropped me off at the Amtrack Station in Sandusky, Ohio a little before 4 AM. I was to catch the Capitol Limited in route to Chicago for the Annual General Retreat of the Society of the Holy Trinity. It was due at 4:05. I waited in the waiting room with the other travelers for a few minutes but soon went outside to wait since it was pleasant early morning. When the train arrived and stopped at 4:35 AM, not bad for AMTRAK standards, the conductor appeared from the next to the last coach car, and waved me over saying, "Over here David, and I will scan your ticket." In this world where one is treated like a number or in an impersonal way it is nice to be called by your name. Never mind if this conductor had the passenger list, and I happened to be the only passenger getting on in Sandusky that morning headed to Chicago. Anyhow It is nice to be called by your name.

In our gospel for this morning, Jesus says to His opponents, "My sheep listen to my voice, I know them, and they follow me." Jesus knows his children by name, His children know Jesus' voice, and they respond and follow where He may lead them." And Jesus knows you and knows your name. Jesus has called you here this morning.

I stand before you this morning as your pastor, not as an expert in shepherding sheep. So, a few years ago I sought out a keeper of sheep, a fellow colleague in ministry out in Central Nebraska. She shared with me that sheep are intended for some kind of relationship with their shepherd. This is a relationship that goes beyond the ability of the sheep to produce wool and milk, and even a nice meat entree for supper, or even a sacrifice to Our Lord God, which may make some of us squirm in our pews this morning. But Jesus does not even mention the sacrifice of sheep in our gospel this morning, does he. For Jesus it is all about the relationship of the Shepherd to the sheep and vice versa. To understand a little bit what Jesus is teaching us it is best we understand the History.

Ever since king David the image of the King to the people of Israel was that of a Shepherd. And David the King/Shepherd was one of the Good King/Shepherds. Of course, Israel and Judah had their share who were bad shepherds who scattered the people and brought destruction to the people by destroying them by fleecing them with military conscription, high taxes, forced labor, bad political alliances, and most of all faithlessness to God. The Good King was likened to King David himself the shepherd boy and most importantly to God Himself who would be the great Shepherd. Later David would pen the Words of the 23rd Psalm, "The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want," and words from the 95th Psalm, "And the We are His people of his pasture and sheep of His hand."

Jesus by calling Himself the Good Shepherd points to His divine rule and kingly relationship with his people. He sets himself in stark contrast to the teachers and leaders of the people in his day to whom he addresses this morning. They are the ones asking Jesus, "If you are the messiah, tell us plainly." They want to know. Settle the issue for us once and for all. But Jesus knows that their hearts are as cold and chilly winter wind that is blowing through the portical of Solomon. Jesus tells them, His signs point to who he is, but they refuse to believe. They are not part of the flock. They have seen Jesus, they have and some of them were around when Jesus gave sight to the man born blind. You can read that account in the preceding chapter of John, Chapter 9. They did not believe Jesus did that sign then, and here they don't see him as the Good Shepherd who will drive the Romans from their land.

It all comes back to the relationship. It all comes down to faith and trusting that Jesus is the one to lead us to those green nourishing pastures and thirst-quenching waters.... (Psalm 23).

This is the word that we can learn from Jesus this morning. And it affects all of us directly. The sheep know His voice and they follow. It seems it does not come automatically. According to my shepherd colleague, it takes time. Trust and familiarity. This trust comes after much time of leading and guiding them to still waters and green pastures and safe havens and treating wounds and delivering their lambs. The shepherd knows their quirks and personalities. He keeps them safe

from danger and approaching storms. He does everything for the benefit of the sheep. And over time the sheep learn they can count on the God Shepherd.

And Jesus is that Good Shepherd for His flock. When we wander off from the flock away from the green pastures that He has led us too because the grass was greener over there, or wandered off from the still waters because we might consider this still water stale, or wandered from the path He leads us on, His mercy and goodness pursues until He overtakes us and rescues us from danger. Even if it means laying His life down for the sheep. And this what Jesus our good shepherd does. This is why Jesus is not a Good Shepherd like King David, Jesus is the Good Shepherd, He has pursued us in our sin all the way to the cross to die for those times when we wandered into sin, to forgive and to restore our relationship with him. That is what Jesus has done in His love for you and me.

There is an old saying that goes something like this, "A dead shepherd means dead sheep." If the cross were the end of the story, then we would all be dead sheep in the end. But the cross is not the end, Jesus rose from the dead. That gives us hope for eternal life.

Jesus our Good Shepherd is not just a Sunday Morning hobby or routine. To grow in this relationship with our Good Shepherd means to be prayer with him, reading his word, the schedule is on the back table if you need direction. It means being in fellowship with His forgiven flock. It is here that we may learn to listen for His voice who calls each of us by name. And finally on the last day when he will call your name to dwell in the house of the Lord forever and to dine at the marriage feast of the Lamb with all who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb, who is at the same time Jesus Christ our Good Shepherd. Amen.