

Easter 4      5/7/17  
John 10:1-10    A

## PSALM 23, THE 1<sup>ST</sup> VERSE, "THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD."

"The Lord is my shepherd." You know that. You genuinely, honestly believe that. It's obvious. You sang about it in the opening hymn. You prayed those very words in the Introit. You said "Praise to you, O Christ," after hearing it read in the lesson. You just got done singing about it again in the hymn of the day. It is absolutely certain to say that because you believe the Lord is your shepherd, no doubt or question about it.

So, if the Lord is your shepherd, that makes all of you sheep. "I am Jesus' little lamb," we will sing. So, you're a sheep. And, that brings up some very comforting images.

Kind of like that on the front of the bulletin. There you have Jesus, the Good Shepherd, holding one of His little lambs, carrying it home. We all like to see ourselves as that little lamb – safe in the arms of Jesus. It's all so lovely, isn't it?

No, not really, and let me tell you why. Don't get me wrong, it is a comforting image when Jesus is carrying you in His arms or on His shoulders, but have you ever stopped to ask yourself this question: WHY are you there? Why is Jesus carrying you? Why are you hearing His voice, and following alone, behind? The Scriptures tells us why. Isaiah makes it perfectly clear, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned – every one – to his own way" (53:6). To put it bluntly – your way is not the shepherd's way.

The shepherd's way is for you lie down in green pastures; to drink from the still waters. The shepherd's way is to keep you from fear and evil. Goodness and mercy following you every day. His will is that you dwell in

the house of the Lord forever. That's His way, but your way is completely different.

Your way is to wander. Your way is go out and roll around in the mud and the muck and the mire of the sins of the world. Your way is wandering off on your own so that you get caught in the thistles and thorns of this world and you worry about and fear earthly things. Your way is such that you get stuck in the thicket of sin, death, and hell. Your way is, instead of still waters, there is a torrent of adultery, lust, murder, hate, coveting, stealing, gossip, rumor, jealousy, envy, and all manner of shame and vice. In your way, you wander around trying to find goodness and mercy; trying to find peace. But, all you find is evil and all you get is harassed by wolves that want to devour you. Your way leads straight to dwelling in hell fire for all eternity. There's no goodness and mercy in your way. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned – every one – to his own way (Is 53:6)."

That's not very comforting, is it? Not a pleasant thought. But, in one way it is. Especially, when you realize how lost you are.

Here's why I say that: Do you remember that time Jesus was going around throughout all the cities and villages of Galilee and "teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction?" He sees the crowds, a lot of people, and when He sees them, He had compassion on them, "because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9).

That's you. Have you ever heard the expression a "cast down sheep"? A "cast down sheep" is an old English shepherd's term for a sheep that has turned over on its back and cannot get up again by itself. That's you. You're harassed. You are covered, dirty, with mud, muck and

the filth and shame and guilt of sin. And, you're helpless to do anything about it. You're like sheep without a shepherd and it's all because you want your own way.

The GOOD NEWS is that Jesus comes, sees you in that condition, and has compassion. He comes to you and picks you up. He carries you and your sins all the way to Calvary's cross, where He shows you exactly what kind of Good Shepherd He is to you. For He Himself says, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep (Jn 10:11)."

So, bearing your sin, your guilt, your death, the Good Shepherd goes to the cross and lays down His life as the all-atoning sacrifice for all of your sins and all the world's sin. And, that Little Lamb of God, means you are forgiven all your sins. And dying and rising on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, He brought life and immortality to light. And that means for you, little lamb, He does the miraculous -- He frees you from the thorns and the thistles of the cares and concerns of this earthly life. He plucks you out of the thicket of sin, death, and hell. He saves you from the torrent of all your sins.

Here's how He does it: We don't really have a lot of sheep in our neck of the woods. But, we've got cows. And, ranchers would brand them. Now, most use ear tags to mark which cows are theirs. All a rancher has to do is look, and he knows exactly which cows are his, and so does everyone else.

Do you recall what happened to you in your baptism? The sign, the mark, of the holy cross was made upon your forehead and your heart to mark you as one of the Good Shepherd's little lambs, such that even the devil knows that you belong to Jesus.

And, then in the washing of regeneration of your baptism, your Good Shepherd cleanses you in the waters of your baptism, washing away all the times you went astray and insisted on going your own way. He washed all your sin so that you are white as snow; your wool is the righteousness of Christ Jesus Himself. That's what your Good Shepherd did because that's what Good Shepherd do for their sheep.

And, you look at Jesus, and say, "The Lord is my shepherd," not because you choose to follow him, but because He plucked you out of the muck and mire of this fallen world, washed you clean, and marked you as one of His own little lambs. He calls you by name and you follow Him.

He leads you here, to the sheep pen of His Church. Here, He not only washes you clean but He feeds you. He calls you by name to His table, where He feeds you His life-giving Body and Blood for forgiveness, life, and salvation. Here, you hear his voice, "Now may this the true body and blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ strengthen and preserve you in the true faith until life everlasting."

He calls you by name to His sheep pen, and speaks the words in your ear, "I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." He speaks words of comfort, love, and mercy. Even when you are tempted to go your own way, He says, "Follow Me." When you despair, He says, "I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

So, following in the Good Shepherd's way, you have no fear. He gives you green pastures to lie in. He leads to you drink of still water. His rod and His staff do comfort you. Goodness and mercy do follow you all the days of your life. And you will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

“The Lord is my shepherd.” You confess that, because you really and truly believe it, because the Good Shepherd laid down His life for you. He marked you as one of His own, washed you clean, and leads you through the darkness of the valley of shadow of death to be with Him in heaven, forever and ever, without end.