

8 S. after Pentecost      7/18/21  
Mark 6:30-44              11B

THEN HE COMMANDED THEM ALL TO SIT DOWN IN GROUPS ON THE GREEN GRASS.

Yes, they'll all come to meet me  
Arms reaching, smiling sweetly  
It's good to touch the green, green grass of home.<sup>1</sup>

That's what sheep do – they touch the green, green grass of home. Or maybe, I ought to say they should touch the green, green grass of home, but longing for and cherishing the green, green grass of home is a lesson that the disciples needed to learn, and we need to learn -- or maybe I should say re-learn every day. Yes, we believe the promises of God to us in His Word, but the sinful flesh clings so tightly to us that we often find ourselves walking by doubt and despair rather than faith; believing the lies of the devil, rather than God's sure and certain Word.

Look at the disciples in our lesson today. V-I-C-T-O-R-Y! The apostles were gloating! The Evangelist tells us, "The apostles returned to Jesus and told Him all that they had done and taught" (v. 30). Jesus had sent out the twelve 2x2 and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. And they cast out many demons, Mark tells us (cf. 6:7,13). And they came back to Jesus in high spirits that even the demons obeyed them.

So they could rest, Jesus said to them, "Come, into a desolate place and do rest up a little," because the crowd was pressing in on them that they did not even have time to eat (v. 31). So, they get in the boat and went to a desolate place. But, once again, there, the people press in upon them. Jesus, being Jesus, had compassion on them because that's what a Shepherd does. Then, the late hour came and the twelve want to know

how all of these people are going to eat. Jesus answered very simply, “You -- yourselves -- give them something to eat” (v. 37).

Suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye, their V-I-C-T-O-R-Y gave way to doubt and despair; walking by their fear rather than in faith in He who the wind and waves obey; who drove the demons from the man in the country of the Gerasenes; and He who raised Jairus’ daughter from death. Didn’t these guys know the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm -- just as you do? “He makes me lie down in green pastures ... You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies” (vv. 2,5).

You know about the eating habits of sheep, right? Sheep are ruminants, which means they have multi-chambered stomachs that help them digest their food. To completely digest their food, sheep will chew and swallow, then regurgitate that cud back into their mouths, to rechew it and swallow again. The KEY for us is to remember here is that sheep cannot eat in haste; they can’t go through the McDonald’s drive through and eat their Big Mac while driving. Sheep need peace and stillness to eat. In fact, it takes about seven hours for a sheep to eat. That’s why the Good Shepherd Psalm says to us frightened sheep, “You prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies” (v. 5). Even in the presence of danger and threat of roaring lions and howling wolves, the Good Shepherd, with His rod and staff, protects us feeble and frail lambs, so that we can eat in peace and stillness.

My Dear Friends in Christ, I’m going to say this again because it’s something I never want you to forget – nothing -- absolutely nothing -- happens by chance in the Bible. So it is that the Evangelist Mark says, “Then He commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass” (v. 39). Our Lord Christ is once again teaching us that He is our Good

Shepherd and we are the sheep of His pasture. Sheep need green grass to eat, so our Shepherd leads us there and watches over us, so that we can eat.

We find ourselves in the midst of a severe drought. For our ranchers and farmers, and ag producers, the drought has meant challenges to their very way of life, not to mention our food supply. Our prayers are with you, and for you. But, as bad as a lack of moisture is, there is even a far greater drought that affects us poor mortals – the drought of God’s Word, when we turn a deaf ear to it, to walk by our fears, our doubts and despair, rather than our faith

Remember Adam and Eve in paradise, right? They got into trouble only because they didn’t listen to the Word of God. They listened to the lies of the serpent. And because they did, they were cast out of paradise into the desolate place of sin, death, and hell.

A desolate place – that’s what we find ourselves living in this day. A place of danger and death, trouble and tears, fretting and fussing.

In the misery and heartache that come to us in this desolate place, what do you do? No, you do not call upon the Lord your God in the day of trouble and trust in Him for deliverance, you naval gaze. “Where are we going to get food to feed all these people? 200 days of wages would not be enough to buy food enough to feed them all!” “Where are Jesus? Where’s the green, green grass, Jesus?”

How like those Israelites of old we are. God led them with unmoistened foot through the Red Sea waters and what did they do?

And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and the people of Israel said to them, “Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you

have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger” (Ex 16:2-3).

They forgot that Egypt, the land of death, was not their home. The Promised Land was their home. They were not looking forward; they were looking back.

Remember what their Shepherd did? He had compassion on them in the desolate place of the wilderness. He fed them with manna and quail, and the Bible says, “Forty years [God] sustained them in the wilderness, and they lacked nothing. Their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell” (Ne 9:21). And, he led them into the Promised Land.

In the thorns and thistles of today, we forget that we are strangers here and our home is heaven, with all of its green, green grass.

The Good News of the Christian faith is that our Shepherd has compassion on us. Like a lamb to the slaughter, He was led to the slaughter of the cross where He lays down His life as the punishment for all the times we doubted God’s Word, we despaired of God’s love and care for us; all the times we walked by our fears; all of our sin. Because He dies on that cross, you are forgiven all of your sin.

Our Good Shepherd lays His life so that He may take it up again. He takes it up again when He rises from the tomb’s dark portal of Easter morning. He takes up His life again so that He can give you V-I-C-T-O-R-Y – over your greatest enemy, death itself.

The Bible says our Shepherd “calls His own sheep by name and leads them out” (Jn 10:3). He called you by name in the waters of your Baptism, to lead you out of sin and its wages of death to life in Him.

“Then He commanded them all to recline in groups on the green grass” (v. 39). Recline, that’s what the Evangelist says, because they

didn't sit at a table like we do – they reclined at a banquet. And the Shepherd gives them a banquet. 5,000 men plus women and children are fed, with full baskets are left for them. For where you have Jesus and the forgiveness of sins, there you have plenty for the people of God.

That's why your Shepherd leads you to His table to feed with you His life-giving Body and Blood. Here, He is forgiving you, strengthening you, and pointing your heart to heaven. For truly, this is a foretaste of the marriage feast in heaven to come.

In this desolate place of sin and death, it is easy to doubt and despair, to fear, but our Shepherd Jesus has mercy on us, pointing our hearts to the green, green grass of heaven, where we will dwell forever, and ever, without end.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.