

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Fourth Sunday of Easter - Year B

60th Week of Pandemic - Zoom Only

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Acts 4:5-12

Psalm 23

I John 3:16-24

John 10:11-18

04/25/2021

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. John:

[Jesus said:] ¹¹“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. ¹⁴I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”

The Gospel of our Lord

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

For the Flock

Good morning! I don't know much about sheep or being a shepherd. Basically it's limited to the fact that sheep are usually pretty relaxed, and that goats are mean, except for the innocent ones that faint whenever you startle them... which is just pure evil in my opinion... those poor little goats... But regardless, my knowledge is limited. What I do know a lot about is cars, especially detailing them.

Which meant that at the family business Crummitt & Son it was only natural that I was in charge of cleaning the trucks. Some detailers specialize in unique clientele, maybe they handle specific collections like Larry Kossila who was in charge of Jerry Seinfeld's large collection of rare and expensive Porsches. Me? Just a bunch of GMC and Chevy flatbed trucks that got very dirty. Now while I understood that there weren't many people who would keep their vehicle in the same state that I would prefer, especially a work truck, the spectrum of care definitely ranged from passable to... detestable. Every once in a while we would get a person who just didn't seem to care how they treated the truck. Besides, it wasn't THEIR truck!

So I can understand the frustration on Jesus' part when he argues that the hired hand doesn't care as much as the Good Shepherd. But it still seems like a pretty demanding level of expectation. Gerard Sloyan agrees, arguing that *"In the real world of shepherding, laying down one's life for one's sheep would seem purposeless unless the marauders had first been rendered ineffective. Otherwise, with the shepherd dead, the sheep would be more vulnerable than before."*¹ What's more, Rudolf Bultman points out

¹ Sloyan, Gerard S. *John*. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009. p. 132.

that there were strict rabbinic rules that laid out what could be expected from a hired hand, and dying for some sheep was not one of them.² So, then, the point that Jesus is making is deeper than what we get from a quick reading. It's not about trashing the hired hands, but about raising the bar for the Good Shepherd.

Speaking of the "Good" shepherd, it's not really the best translation. Raymond E. Brown argues for the "model" shepherd. *"Model. Or 'noble'; perhaps 'noble' would be more exact here and 'model' more exact for verse 14. [The] Greek kalos means 'beautiful' in the sense of an ideal or model of perfection."*³ So, this Gospel text isn't about us. It's about Jesus. It can be tempting to draw comparisons with our own calling and that of the "Good" or "Model" shepherd, but we're just the sheep.

Where we CAN make comparisons is in the relationship that Jesus has with the Father. We can often make the mistake in thinking that the Father loves Jesus because of his willingness to die. But that's incorrect. *"God loves Jesus because Jesus lives out God's commandment fully. In the Fourth Gospel, the core commandment that Jesus gives his disciples is that they love one another just as he has loved them. The sign of Jesus' love for them is that he is willing to lay down his life for them... his death is the ultimate expression of the love relationship that already exists and defines who he is and how he enacts God's will for the world."*⁴

The love that we have for one another, shown to us by the model shepherd, calls on us to dive deeper than what society expects. Remember,

² Bultmann, Rudolf. *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*. Philadelphia, Pa: Westminster Press, 1971. p. 367.

³ Brown, Raymond E. *The Gospel According to John. Part 1*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966. p. 288.

⁴ Keck, Leander E. *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*. Volume 8. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2015. p. 571.

the hired hand wasn't required to give so much, but what we are called to is something more! Our second reading from I John raises the bar: *"18 Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action."*⁵ What we are doing isn't enough. If we think that we're a good person, and that it's been easy, we're not doing nearly enough. One of the criticisms that you'll see from non-Christians is captured perfectly in a comic that portrays a Christian in a boat leaning over looking at someone who is drowning. Rather than helping the drowning person, the Christian shouts "Thoughts and prayers!"

This isn't some misguided works-righteousness, some attempt to make sure we earn our way into heaven. If you're a Christian because you fear Hell, you have missed the whole point. An atheist who does good work is a better person than the Christian who is motivated simply by the hope that they avoid punishment. No, what we do is out of an expression of love for one another, a love shown to us by Jesus, the "good" shepherd. When we come together as a community, the love that can grow between us flows from the love between the Father and Jesus. And so we're pushed outward to show that love to others, to help gather the whole flock together. We often read Psalm 23 at funerals but I think it captures perfectly the result of being a part of that community. So, sit back and listen to the goodness that is a part of living in relationship with God and one another:

"1The Lord | is my shepherd; I shall not | be in want. 2The Lord makes me lie down | in green pastures and leads me be- | side still waters. 3You restore my | soul, O Lord, and guide me along right pathways | for your name's sake. 4Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall | fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff,

⁵ I John 3:18 NRSV

they | comfort me. 5You prepare a table before me in the presence | of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil, and my cup is | running over.

6Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days | of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the | Lord forever.”⁶ Amen.

⁶ Psalm 23 NRSV