

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 4:5-12; Psalm 23; 1 John 3:16-24; John 10:11-18

In our Gospel this morning, Jesus is telling the people a parable about a good shepherd who was honest, caring, compassionate, and willing to die to take care of his sheep. Jesus is telling us something about Himself, as He is the good shepherd for our lives.

Jesus as the good shepherd, is the model that a shepherd brings to the job, the strength and courage of an earthly shepherd, but also the qualities of beauty and kindness which helps us to call him friend.

Now that we have laid the foundation for Jesus being the Good shepherd of our lives, the model shepherd, we can consider what is so good about Him, why He is the "model shepherd". He is telling us through this parable three things about Himself as the good shepherd.

First, Jesus says, that the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. A shepherd in Jesus day, if he truly did his job with all of his being, and not just for the money, would be willing and able to lay down his life for the sheep he was protecting. Jesus is telling us, He was willing to lay down His life for us, His sheep. He wasn't in it for the money or the glory, but Jesus would not flee when trouble came, He was willing to lay down His life, to sacrifice His life for us so that we might gain favor with the Father in heaven.

Jesus as the good shepherd died for us as the Lamb of God, and

God accepts us because we are clothed with the Lamb's robe of righteousness. Jesus was willing to lay down His life for us, so that we might have life, life with the Father and life for eternity.

The good shepherd, who Jesus is, is willing to die for the sheep, so that the sheep can live. Jesus died for us freely so that we might have life.

Notice Jesus says that He laid down His life freely, no one takes His life, but He was willing to give His life for us. Jesus loves us enough, cares about us enough, to die for us. He could have used his power to get out of dying for us, but He chose to struggle, to die, so that we might live. This is a powerful statement of the love, the mercy, the compassion, and the caring that Jesus our Savior has for each of us.

Next, Jesus says that the good shepherd knows his sheep by name. A young lady came to her minister's office troubled about this statement, "How does Jesus know me, and how can He be interested, in me personally?" she asked, "How can I believe that God is interested in what happens to me?" The pastor replied, "Look at your fingers. There are billions of finger tips in the world, but no others are like yours. Even your finger tips have had special attention from God."

We are all God's children and as individuals, he is concerned about us, He cares about us, He reaches His hand of grace, individually, into each of our lives.

Each of us, all of us, are unique people, who are special to God.

We are special, not because we are good, or righteous, or have somehow pleased God, but because God loves us as we are, or in some ways in spite of what we are, God still loves us. He showed us that by the sacrifice He had His Son make on the cross for us. God is concerned about us from the hairs on our heads to the blisters on our toes. God, through His good

shepherd, Jesus Christ, loves us, cares about us, and wants His gracious will of love to be done in each of our lives.

Finally, as the good shepherd, Jesus tells us He gathers together His sheep into a fold. Jesus is telling us through His spirit He gathers us who belong to Him. It is the work of the spirit to gather us together as the members of the body of Christ. It is the work of the spirit, to gather the body, at least once a week, to worship and praise God.

Jesus knows this time we spend together once a week is very important for our spiritual lives. It is during this time that we hear again the promises that God has made for us, it is here that we relive the life that Jesus lived on this earth. It is here that we encounter, again and again, the great love that God has for us. It is important that we come here often to be refreshed, to be renewed, to hear again about our God and the great love He has for us.

As the good shepherd, Jesus says that it is important for Him to gather the sheep together into a fold, but notice He doesn't stop with just the sheep that are immediately at hand, no, He says that other sheep must be brought into this fold. The fold of sheep, the church, is always changing, growing, adding and losing members. The fold is not a constant place, but it is an alive place, a place where things happen, where changes are made, where people grow in faith, where people meet new people of faith, who help us to understand God's love.

The fold, or the church, is an ever changing, alive, growing place. If it isn't, it should be. It is the place where Jesus, through his spirit is alive. It is the place where we can encounter God through His spirit, because He promises to be here with us as we gather in His name. God is here with us today, His spirit is here leading us in our worship of Him.

And as we leave to go back out to world, God's spirit will go with us, helping us with life, giving us direction, giving us courage, giving us His peace to cope with all the broken-ness of life. Yes, the good shepherd gathers His sheep together in a fold, in the church, because here, we are cared for, here we are feed, here we can learn from each other about faith, here we can help one another as we face all the difficulties of life.

Yes, Jesus is the good shepherd of our lives. He laid down his life freely for us, He knows each of us personally because we are important to Him, and He gathers us together in His fold, the church, so that we might listen to Him. Yes, Jesus is the good shepherd, the one who leads us down the pathway of life. He is our guide, He is our companion, He is the one who will take care of us. Jesus is our good shepherd, He is the one who loves us.

AMEN.