

Text: John 10:22-30

The Lord Is The Shepherd...Are We Good Sheep?

Here are a few little known facts about sheep. 1. The world has over 1 billion sheep! Australia has the most sheep. The US has almost 9 million sheep. Texas is the largest producer of sheep in this country. Some sheep are used for food and some for just producing wool. Some breeds also provide milk and cheese. There are also some breeds that have been and continue to live in the wild. Sheep are more numerous and raised in more places than any other domesticated animal, and are found in almost every country of the world. Sometimes they are used as pack animals carrying burdens for their owners. Sheep are cud chewing animals with 4 stomachs. (Think of the damage we could do at the smorgasbord with 4 stomachs!)

A couple I knew back in Iowa had a hobby farm and raised sheep. Some of the sheep were nice, cute, and loveable. One year their daughter raised a lamb for 4H and named her ewe Betsy. She won a prize and part of the 4H process is that those prize winners get sold to a meat packer and so Betsy was slaughtered. It was quite traumatic for the young lady and you could tell she was mourning for this sheep she had raised from a lamb.

Now some sheep aren't so cute. In fact, one of her sheep in particular was downright mean. He was a ram, and his name was Sunshine. We'll hear more about Sunshine later. We have read John 10:22-30. Most of John's 10th chapter is about this metaphor of the Good Shepherd. In previous verses Jesus tells about the character of the Good Shepherd, Jesus, who was sent to save his sheep, his people. In this section he focuses on the character of the sheep he came to save. Today we're going to ask and hopefully answer the question "The Lord is the Shepherd are we good sheep?"

In this reading we find 4 things that characterize Jesus' redeemed sheep. 1. First of all, Jesus says, "My Sheep Listen to My Voice" vs 27. When Jesus says, "My sheep". He is referring to those people who believe in him as Savior and are the sheep that belong to Him. He's referring to us sinful sheep whom he redeemed and saved. Jesus bought these sheep at a great price, his sacrificial blood that stained the cross. These sheep know their helplessness and have repented of their sin and accepted Jesus as their Great Shepherd, and they belong to Him.

Jesus says, "The sheep that belong to Me listen to My voice." This is in direct contrast to the Jews that gathered around Him in the Temple. They were obviously not listening because they said, "How long will You keep us in suspense?" Why don't You just spit it out?" "Tell us plainly...are You the Christ?" Jesus replied, "I DID tell you...but you don't believe (in other words, you don't listen for you are deaf in these spiritual matters.)" Earlier in John's gospel, Jesus explained what listening to him was like. He said, "The watchman opens the gate for the Shepherd, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

He adds, "When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." That paints quite a picture. The Shepherd calls out to the sheep. Those sheep that recognize the Shepherd's voice, listen to that voice. But there are other sheep that don't recognize His voice. They don't listen to the Shepherd. They just keep doing whatever

they want to do. Just like Jesus' opponents, the Pharisees and rulers of the people of his own day.

It's fairly obvious how this applies to us Christians? To consider ourselves Christians we listen to the voice of Jesus. If Jesus comes and calls out to us, our ear will be tuned to hear His voice. Good sheep will stop what they are doing, pay attention to our Master's voice, and as the Holy Spirit gives us the power we follow Jesus.

But, what if we keep chewing our cud and just focus on what WE want, and disregard the voice of the Shepherd? Obviously we haven't recognized the Shepherd as our Master.

Let me illustrate it like this. Let's say that there's this sheep named Bill. Bill says... "Hey...I'm a pretty good sheep. In fact, I'm a Christian. See that Guy over there with the robe and beard? Carrying the Shepherd's staff? That's Jesus. I belong to Him. He's my Master". And then...we hear the Shepherd calling out. "Hey Bill...come on. Time to go to church. But Bill has a tee time and ignores the voice. And keeps doing what he wants with his life. What does that say about Bill? That tells us that Bill can SAY he's a Christian all he wants. But he doesn't listen to the voice of Christ. Then he doesn't really belong to Christ. Jesus says, "My sheep listen to My voice".

Jesus goes on to say, "I Know My Sheep." In fact he knows all about his sheep. He knows about their health and well-being. He knows about their weaknesses. He knows about their strengths. understands. He cares. He has affection for each one. Sheep generally are not very smart. They can do some stupid things. They can get themselves into a real jam sometimes. But the good and patient shepherd knows and understands about his sheep. He loves them anyway even when they don't listen.

Isn't it comforting to be one of those sheep Jesus knows so well. It fills us with great joy to realize. That Jesus KNOWS you and me!! He knows when we're hurting. He knows when we're sad. He knows when we're tempted. He knows when we're scared. And not only does He know. But He knows exactly what is best for us. An author once wrote, "In the Highlands of Scotland, a sheep would often wander off into the rocks and get into places that they couldn't get out of. The grass on these mountains is very sweet and the sheep like it, and they will jump down a bank ten or twelve feet, and then they can't jump back again, and the shepherd hears them bleating in distress. They may be there for days, until they have eaten all the grass. The shepherd will wait until they are so faint they cannot stand, and then they will put a rope around him, and he will go over and pull that sheep up out of the jaws of death." "Why don't they go down there when the sheep first gets there?" someone once asked. "Ah!" He said, "they are so very foolish they would dash right over the precipice and be killed if they did!" And that is the way with us, we won't go back to God till we have lost everything and are so weak from the struggles of life. If you wander away from Jesus, be assured that the Good Shepherd will bring you back the moment you have given up trying to save yourself and are willing to let Him save you His own way.

Being that Good Shepherd, Jesus knows what is best for us. That is a great blessing because we seldom know what is best for us.. We think in terms of immediate gratification. Christ thinks in terms of eternity.

Let's go back to Bill, the Sheep I mentioned earlier. Not only must we HEAR the voice of the Shepherd. But we must obey. We must follow. None of this arguing...like the Pharisees. "But Jesus we sometimes think, if You are real and You really love me.

Help me win the lottery. Do a miracle for my marriage that's failing even if I don't go to counseling and look at my own responsibility for the failure.. Bless me even when I haven't worked for myself, turned in repentance, or even prayed. THEN I'll follow You.

Jesus leads us, but do we follow Him? There is no lack of his leading. He gives us his word in the Bible, we hear it in every Church service. Jesus is here...speaking...leading...guiding. Do we follow? Not only here in church, but in your home, at work, at school, at the grocery store, doing your chores, paying your bills, and your taxes. Do you listen for the voice of Christ? Are we attentive to that still small voice or are we too busy, too caught up in our own thoughts and feelings. Christ speaks through the word and Sacrament and it is great blessing to follow and obey, because the 4th characteristic of Christ's Sheep is "out of this world"!

Jesus says, "I give My Sheep Eternal Life." Some believe that once they "get saved" nothing they can do will interfere with their eternal reward. It is most certainly true that God's work is sure, but our eternal salvation depends on trusting God and realizing that we are still sinners who can do nothing to gain or earn that eternal reward. But as sinners we still have in our own nature the possibility of rejecting that eternal reward. We can pull away and complain to Jesus. "I can handle this life by myself. Christ, never one to force His way upon us. Will reluctantly let us go. Knowing that we will most certainly fall. And will most likely come crying back to Him. To pick us up and again. And hold us and protect us. And Christ being Who He is. In His great love. He reaches out and picks us up. And holds us close... Sheep are interesting creatures. Sometimes they are good sheep. Obediently following the Shepherd. But sometimes, sheep can be like Sunshine. Remember Sunshine? That was a ram on the farm where that 4H winner lived. No matter how they tried to train and guide Sunshine he resisted. He would head butt whoever happened to be in the pen. Many times the 4Her wasn't watching and one time Sunshine head-butted her and broke her tailbone.

I don't know much about sheep. But, as far as people go. There are believing sheep. Who listen to their Master's voice. And follow Him. And then there are unbelieving sheep, (God called them goats) who continually go their own way. Jesus said that the day is coming when Christ will separate the sheep from the goats. And the determining factor in being sheep or goats is whether they listened and followed the voice of the Good Shepherd? The good news is that even if we don't listen and follow him perfectly, Jesus is here today in his word and Sacrament to build our faith and lead us to trust in the Good Shepherd. Listen to His voice, repent of sin and know that we are saved only by the undeserved love of the Savior who died and rose again to make us His sheep. Are you following Him? Or, are you trying to make it in this life and in the next life in your own way? Don't miss out on the victory the Good Shepherd has won for us on the cross and at the empty tomb. Be his good sheep today and forever.