

Good Shepherd Sunday Sermon May 7, 2017

Sermon Text: John 10:1-10

Sermon Theme: Jesus is the Good Shepherd

“I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ² The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. ³ The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” ⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them.

⁷ Therefore Jesus said again, “I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

What makes a good leader? Honesty or truthfulness would probably top the list. Fairness would also be there too. But leadership is much more than honesty or fairness. If we look at the of the strongest and weakest presidents. The strongest leaders are not always seen as the fairest and most honest president and the fairest and honest president is not always viewed as the best leader.

While honesty and fairness are certainly on the list of what makes a good leader, a good leader usually has a goal in mind and then develops a plan to reach that goal. Not all of the decisions to get to the goal will be popular, but the leader leads with the goal in mind always making sure that the decisions lead to the goal.

Jesus is the greatest leader of all. The goal of heaven that he has for us is the most important goal for each of us. Yet, unlike the many leaders, presidents, and CEO’s of this world Jesus doesn’t call himself a leader at all; he calls himself a shepherd: a Good Shepherd. Our Good Shepherd, Jesus, leads us to the goal of heaven. He not only leads us to the goal he is also the gate through which we enter.

We would probably not list the job of shepherding as a job that shows much leadership. Yet, shepherd has to show a lot of leadership qualities. These qualities are shown to sheep instead of people. Some of the great Bible leaders were shepherds first. God taught Job, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Moses, Saul and David about leadership and faith as they led their sheep from place to place and kept them safe.

In Bible times, almost everyone had a touch with shepherding. Even if a family did not have flocks themselves, many people would have a sheep or two of their own for milk, or wool or meat. Even if it didn’t carry over into adulthood, many children would have grown up tending to a sheep. Because of this deep understanding of shepherding and sheep, the Bible uses the pictures of shepherding and sheep over 500 times to teach the beautiful relationship of our God, the Shepherd, who tends, cares and watches out for his people, the sheep.

In our sermon text for today, Jesus uses sheep and shepherding to teach an important lesson about following him.

Jesus had healed a man who was blind since birth. Instead of praising God for this miracle, the Pharisees had begun to accuse Jesus of sinning because he healed on the Sabbath. Their hearts and minds were blind to the Savior who was right in front of them. They refused to follow their Good Shepherd and tried to lead others away from him.

Jesus often told parables in the mixed company of believers and unbelievers. No matter what the people thought about Jesus, the details of the parable would engage them. They would begin to make judgments and anticipate what Jesus was trying to teach to them. While some would wait for Jesus to explain to them what it meant, others would think Jesus was just telling a good story.

The reaction of the people to these parables showed what was in their hearts. If they listened as he explained what he meant, repented of their sins and turned to Jesus, they were true believers.

On the other hand, if they thought Jesus stories were crazy, if they angered them, if they refused to listen, a parable would confirm that they did not have faith in their hearts.

Jesus begins this parable by telling us what a Good Shepherd is not. He warns us to watch out for false shepherds and not to follow them. The false shepherd is underhanded and sneaky, a thief or a robber. He does

not belong in the pen, so instead of entering past the man at the gate, he tries to climb into the pen by some other way. He is not there to help the sheep, but for his own evil purposes. He tries to sneak into the pen to steal the sheep away from their Good Shepherd.

The appearance of this shepherd causes the sheep trouble. They are not comfortable with his appearance. They know that this is not right. His presence, his voice, makes them afraid. While he may look like their shepherd, and maybe even sound like him, he is not the Good Shepherd that they know so well.

The Good Shepherd is different. The good shepherd, along with the other true shepherds, does not need to sneak into the pen, the man at the gate welcomes him in. Even though there might be two or three herds of sheep in the sheep pen, when the **Good Shepherd calls to his sheep**, they are not afraid, they come to him. They know his voice and they are willing to follow him because they love and trust in him.

But the Good Shepherd doesn't just assume that he has the correct sheep, he has a personal relationship with his sheep. He knows his sheep by sight and has even given each one of them a name.

The Good Shepherd is good not only because he calls us and names us but because **he goes ahead of the sheep**. He does not point us on our way and then set us free to wander towards the goal. He walks ahead of us, making sure that the sheep are led to safety and security.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd because he calls us and leads us with his Word. The false prophet has a message that sounds good, but in the end it is not correct. The false shepherd reaches out with many things that seem important to us in this earthly life. Often we listen because we think that they are important. We want a shepherd that leads us to all the green pastures that this world has to offer. We want to hear that Jesus loves us, we want to hear that Jesus gives us good water and good pasture and we want to take advantage of those blessings right now. We don't want to hear that our own sin can cause valleys, and storms and problems that we need the shepherd to lead us through.

Our Good Shepherd leads us to the goal of heaven. He provides us with true shepherds, pastors and teachers who love his Word and are willing to preach and teach that Word in its truth and purity. They will make sure to call and lead in the same way that Christ called and led; with the Law and the Gospel. And through that calling and leading with the Word of God we are led to the goal of heaven.

A leader that calls to us to join him, knows us personally by name, leads us personally to our goal, sounds like a pretty good leader. Yet, Jesus is much better than that, our Good Shepherd does not just lead us to the goal, he is the goal. He is the gate through which we enter heaven.

Jesus earthly teaching was clear: Repent, heaven is through me. As Jesus leads with the Word, his message is clear, the only way that the sheep will enter the gates of heaven is by believing in me.

This is why Jesus warns us to stay away from false shepherds. False shepherds, no matter how wonderful they may look or sound, will only lead us to destruction and hell. The gates they are leading us towards are false gates which do not lead to Jesus. We may know some of those false gates just by hearing them:

- The Everyone Gate: God loves people too much to send them to hell. There is no Law, there is no hell, God will allow all people to enter heaven through his gate.
- The Good Person Gate: God will allow you to enter this gate if you are a good person.
- The Hard-Worker Gate: God will allow you to enter if you have earned it from him.
- The Pride Gate: God will allow me to enter because I am a great person.
- The Perfect-Attendance Gate: God will allow me to enter because I have always been a member of this congregation, I have been in church most Sundays and I have always been a good Christian.
- The Prosperity Gate: God will let me in. I can tell that from all the good stuff he has given to me, he would never turn me away.

None of these false gates is the gate that leads to heaven, but they are all gates that at one time or another we have been walking towards. Whether it has been through the sins of pride or selfishness, our sinful nature has thought we are worthy of receiving the gift of heaven, not because of what Jesus has done for us, because of what we have done.

And yet, although we may be wandering from the path that leads to heaven, our Good Shepherd continues to call us by name, he continues to forgive us when we listen to other voices that lead us away. He calls us and guides us back to the only path which leads to heaven.

Jesus says, **“I am the gate, my sheep follow my voice, whoever enters through me will be saved.”** Jesus is so confident that his sheep will know the difference between a false shepherd and true shepherd, he is so confident that we will follow him to the correct gate because he knows that his sheep love his voice and listen to it often.

Sheep crave their shepherd’s voice because when they are with him, they know they will be led to food, water and safety. As sheep of the Good Shepherd, we crave his voice in his Word because we know that it will reassure us on God’s blessed hand, which is on us here on earth, and give us the hope and comfort of the blessing of our heavenly home.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd because he leads us, his sheep, to the goal of heaven. But he is more than a good leader, Jesus is the Good Shepherd because he is the gate to heaven for us. The only gate to heaven has been opened because of Jesus sacrifice for us. It is through that gate, and that gate alone, that those who believe in him will be saved.

Thank God, that he has called us by name to be part of his flock. Thank God that our Good Shepherd is even now leading us along the road that leads to the gates of heaven. Amen