

## **“The Good Shepherd”**

A sermon by the Rev. Frances Savill

Sunday May 3, 2020

John 10:1-15

One of the most well-known passages of the Bible is Psalm 23, The Lord is my shepherd.

The psalm brings words of comfort, about green pastures and still waters and being restored, and about God’s guidance in the valley of the shadow of death.

But we don’t see many shepherds around anymore- and even if we did they would be quite different from the shepherds of Jesus’ day.

So let’s spend a few minutes thinking about Jesus’ words and what he is claiming about himself.

First, just to remember, David, the most loved king of God’s people, started out life as a shepherd.

Moses, when he heard God speak out of the burning bush, was keeping his father-in-law’s sheep out in the wilderness.

Shepherds lived with their sheep.

Sheep pens were often made of stone, and the shepherd himself would act as the gate.

To get into or out of the sheep pen, you would have to either go over the wall- like a thief or a robber, or you would have to through the shepherd.

The health and care of the flock is the shepherd’s central concern.

His whole livelihood is tied up in his sheep.

If the sheep did well, the shepherd was in good shape.

He was entirely invested in his sheep, and the sheep thriving under his care.

Sheep are not the brightest animals of God’s creation.

Sheep will eat poisonous vegetation, they don’t have a good sense of direction and easily get lost, and they don’t have a lot of ability to defend themselves, especially when they are separated from the flock.

A lost, alone sheep, is fast on its way to becoming a dead sheep.

For some folks this all sounds like great news.

You feel like a lost sheep.

Life has been difficult, you feel uncertain and vulnerable, you are looking for sure guidance, and a loving Shepherd who isn't selling anything, who only has your best interest at heart, one who would down his life for his you.

You are happy to be a sheep, following the shepherd's voice.

For some people you might not hear it as quite so inviting.  
We don't always like the idea of being sheep in need of a shepherd.

Many people want God to be a kind of high level consultant – we ask for wise advice the odd time, but generally we go our own way, and we stay in control.

That is not the image of the relationship between the sheep and the good shepherd.

My experience of God is that he doesn't treat me like a dumb sheep- unless I am particularly acting like it.

Sometimes he treats me like a lost sheep that needs reassurance, but Jesus says his relationship to his flock is like his Father's relationship to him.

I don't think God the Father ever treated Jesus as a dumb sheep.

What I do see in my relationship with Jesus, and Jesus' relationship to his Father is loving, daily care, and providing direction, strength and abundant life in a life filled with challenge and serving the Father's mission day by day.

Jesus says he goes ahead of the sheep and leads them, but it isn't just to green pastures and quiet waters.

Sometimes there are times of rest, and renewal, healing and receiving, but that is never the end of the story.

Often to get to those places of rest and renewal there is a journey through difficult terrain, and suddenly a patch of rough weather or a storm can threaten the health of the sheep.

I don't know anyone who serves God's mission that doesn't find it challenging and more than they can handle in their own strength.

God sends, stretches and grows us, God calls us to places we would not go on our own. God knows what we can do with his help, and it is always more than we would ever imagine.

When we follow Jesus, the good shepherd, there is promised this wonderful relationship between the sheep and the shepherd.

No matter what the terrain, no matter what the storm or weather right now, he is with us.

The shepherd knows the sheep by name, which means he knows us all as individuals. You and I are not the same.

Even when we are raised at the same time, or if we have the same interests, we have different strengths, and different challenges.

The shepherd knows each sheep.

He doesn't just know about sheep in general – though he does know all about us.

But he also knows us.

Knowing takes trust and self-disclosure.

You can only know me if I let you.

You can know a lot about me – but you won't really know me, what makes me who I am, how I feel, why I think the things I do, unless I tell you, and you take the time to listen.

It is the same for us in knowing the Good Shepherd.

At the end of the day, Christian faith isn't primarily a philosophy a way of understanding life, though it will also give you both of those.

And Christian faith isn't primarily a set of moral principles, though you will also get thrown in.

Christian faith is primarily a relationship of deeply knowing and being known.

Christians don't just know about God, but are invited into a personal relationship with Jesus.

We hear his voice. He calls us by name.

He reveals himself to us, and we are invited to journey with him all day every day in a way that we follow and learn to know him more and more.

As you receive communion today, I invite you to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd, calling you, inviting you to learn of him, and to allow him to learn of you.

At his table, we see the truth that the Good Shepherd gives his life for his sheep.