

The good shepherd. A sermon preached on January 31, 2016 at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George, BC by Rev. Herb Hilder

Lessons: PSALM 23

JOHN 10:11-18

The imagery of sheep, lambs and shepherds is a rich one in scripture

For me,

As I expect for many of you who grew up in a community of faith, the Shepherd Psalm – 23 and I am the good shepherd were first told on a flannel graph.

It was my first piece of SS memory work – those KJV cadences still echoing in my mind.

My home church and the first church I served as solo minister also had stained glass windows of the Good Shepherd for those boring parts of worship – something to look at...

Psalms 23 – the writer writes from the standpoint of a sheep speaking about its owner – the Shepherd.

It is a passage of scripture that still retains a power to engage and be remembered,

Even if the memory is a distant one

Often in preparing for celebration of life services with families who have little or no church connection,

It is Psalm 23 that the family wish read

It is a good psalm – no flummery!!

In John 10, the Lord speaks about himself as the good shepherd

He describes His relationship with his sheep – those who would follow him – then and now.

There are at least two temptations to which we must not succumb as we hear again these two texts and reflect upon them,

One is to believe these texts have been mined of all their value – and therefore we can zone out as it were

Say what a colleague once said to me, when I announced I was about to preach on John 10 – “oh! That text!

Read – nothing here for most of us mate that we don’t already know!

Arrogant – yep!

But familiarity of anything, even Bible texts and stories can lead us to exhibit such closed mindedness.

The other temptation is to use either or both texts as a way to beak or hammer at a community of faith

That is, to make it crystal clear about how much like sheep people really are –

Citing of course barely disguised examples of sheep like behavior within a particular community of faith.

I am not saying there is no comparison between human dynamics and behavior and the behavior of sheep – individual and in flocks.

I think there are comparisons – frighteningly similar comparisons actually.

But to use the texts solely to beak or hammer away at a congregation is a waste of good texts – no matter how much as colleagues in ministry might wish to do so and congregations might need it

Beginning a sermon with words like “ all we like sheep have gone astray...we’re really like sheep astray and let me tell you how so!!! – is probably not the wisest and most sensitive way to use precious preaching time in a worship service!!!

So,

Recognizing these two temptations about sheep, lambs and shepherd scriptural texts,

What hopeful, reassuring and love of God reminders can we highlight?

By choice, I am going to concentrate more on Jesus’ words in John 10

I am the good shepherd (vs.10.14) Two times in 4 verses.

Nothing Jesus says is accidental or just filler

Jesus sees himself not only not only as a shepherd but definitive article followed by adjective **THE GOOD shepherd.**

Consider the word 'good' for a moment
What does the word mean in this context?

For one thing, I believe it reinforces what Jesus has just said in the latter half of vs 10

I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly.

Not a life full of stuff and possessions – for these things do not endure and never bring long term contentment and peace

In fact such things often create an opposite mindset – fear of losing them, and dissatisfaction of not having enough!

Not a life that is trouble and stress free.

For this side of heaven, no one gets that, for the world in which we live is out of joint, imperfect, fallen.

No, when Jesus speaks here in verse 10 and elsewhere about 'abundant life', he is speaking about a life that need not be weighed down by old hurts and memories,

Guilt and sin

A life where we can pay more attention to the times of wonder and awe in our lives,

Because God is in charge – we are not!

A life where we can more fully enjoy the good things of this life because they are a reflection of a lavish and generous God

Think for a moment on the phrases from Psalm 23.

I shall not want (vs.1)

He makes me lie down in green pastures (vs.2)

He restores my soul (vs.3 (

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies

You anoint my head with oil;

My cup overflows (vs.5)

Or from Psalm 103

...the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him and his righteousness to children's children, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments (vs.17, 18)

This is what the GOOD Shepherd does!

This is the promise to those who are prepared to acknowledge and live daily with that declaratory promise –I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Isn't that incredibly good news?

Does it not offer a much needed perspective, sense of purpose, meaning and hope in this life?

I know my own and my own know me (vs.14b)

That is a picture of relationship,

Of time spent together, of trust, of care, of interest
in those under the shepherd's watch.

Of the shepherd's personal knowledge of them.

The shepherd and those under his care are
NOT in some long distance relationship.

This is not a detached, cold relationship.

Rather, this is an intimate understanding of
which sheep likes to run ahead,

Of which sheep are the most playful.

When Katharine and I were first married
we lived in a little community called Hillsburgh

which is located at the centre of a triangle of
Fergus, Orangeville and Guelph in Ontario.

It was a farming community rapidly becoming
suburban

Behind our house was a large field and in that
field were a number of sheep,

Katharine and I often remarked how interesting it
was that it was the black sheep that the others

always followed – no matter what

There was a sermon or three in the making –
which we never preached

Interesting – but even this independent black
sheep would respond to the call of the
shepherdess.

Like that shepherdess of our memories, the
good shepherd of John 10 knows his sheep,

Calls their names

Counts their heads when they enter and leave the sheepfold.

This s a shepherd who loves his sheep
 For the shepherd, this is not just a job; this is the shepherd's life because these are his sheep.
 These sheep exist because he protects them,
 Guards them
 Searches for them and brings them home each night.

I know my sheep and they know me

To have scripture interpret scripture, let me slowly read the opening verses of Psalm 139
 Let the me in the Psalm, become YOU, your life, your existence,

O LORD, you have searched me and known me.

**² You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
 you discern my thoughts from far away.**

**³ You search out my path and my lying down,
 and are acquainted with all my ways.**

**⁴ Even before a word is on my tongue,
 O LORD, you know it completely.**

**⁵ You hem me in, behind and before,
 and lay your hand upon me.**

**⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
 it is so high that I cannot attain it.**

⁷ Where can I go from your spirit?

Or where can I flee from your presence?

**⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
 if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.**

- ⁹ If I take the wings of the morning
 and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me,
 and your right hand shall hold me fast.
¹¹ If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me,
 and the light around me become night',
¹² even the darkness is not dark to you;
 the night is as bright as the day,
 for darkness is as light to you.
¹³ For it was you who formed my inward parts;
 you knit me together in my mother's womb.
¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and
 wonderfully made.
 Wonderful are your works;
 that I know very well.(vs 1-14)

You see,

It is only when an individual sees himself/herself
 as *known before God* that he/she will get serious
 about and with God.

It is only then that we can really say and mean

Lord, take me,

Search me

Examine me carefully,

Put me right

Let me be Yours

And please you be mine!

Until that happens, we will continue to play
 our pathetic little games

Putting our hands over our eyes and saying like a child – I cannot see you, so you cannot see me!!
 Or, we believe as though we are doing God a great favour to allow Him to draw near.
 What arrogance we sometimes exhibit? Yes
 How obtuse shall we remain?

There is no limit to the love and mercy of God for each of us
 Here in Job 10, this is affirmed in vs 15 ... **I lay down my life for the sheep.**

Picture a shepherd in the evening acting as a gate for the sheepfold.
 The shepherd lays down in the opening and essentially becomes the gate
 Nothing comes out and nothing comes in unless it comes through the shepherd first

It is a challenge to hear the Good Shepherd in our lives,
 To be patient and to listen to Him.
 C. S. Lewis in his Mere Christianity wrote I believe one of the most descriptive reasons why it is so hard to hear the Good Shepherd
 He wrote this in the 1950's – life is a great deal noisier and faster today, but I think the description speaks with ever greater power and necessity today.
 Let me read Lewis' words to you again

That is why the real problem of the Christian life comes where people do not usually look for it. It comes the very moment you wake up each morning. All your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists simply in shoving them all back; in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that other larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in. and so on, all day. Standing back from all your natural fussings and frettings; coming in out of the wind.

We can only do it for moments at first. But from those moments the new sort of life will be spreading through our system: because now we are letting Him work at the right part of us. It is the difference between paint, which is merely laid on the surface, and a dye or stain which soaks right through.

He never talked vague, idealistic gas. When He said, "Be perfect," He meant it. He meant that we must go in for the full treatment. It is hard; but the sort of compromise we are all hankering after is harder—in fact, it is impossible. It may be hard for an egg to turn into a bird; it would be a jolly sight harder for it to learn to fly while remaining an egg. We are like eggs at

**present. And you cannot go on indefinitely
being just an ordinary, decent egg. We must
be hatched or go bad.**

The Lord knows us – each of us – our needs, our
fears, our anxieties and our hopes
If we have not already done so, isn't past time
that we placed the whole of our lives in the
GOOD SHEPHERD'S CARE?