

Daily Discipleship

Fourth Sunday of Easter B) – John 10:11-18

The Path of Discipleship: *Inspired by Compassion*

Focus Question: *How do I follow Jesus, the Good Shepherd?*

word of life

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”

John 10:11 (NRSV)

Read John 10:11-18

This Sunday is known as “Good Shepherd” Sunday, and the readings reflect this theme. The beloved 23rd Psalm is usually sung or read this day; and the familiar words from John’s Gospel invite the reader to reflect on the imagery of Jesus as the good shepherd.

1. *Describe a good shepherd.*

God as shepherd is an imagery rich in Old Testament symbolism. God is seen as the shepherd of the sheep in contrast with the shepherds who have not cared for the flock. (Ezekiel 34:11-16) God’s servant David is also called a shepherd of his people. (Ezekiel 37:24) God as shepherd is also described in Psalm 23, where God provides for the needs of the flock. Elsewhere in the New Testament, Jesus is “the great shepherd of the sheep.” (Hebrews 13:20)

2. *What does it mean to think of Jesus as the good shepherd?*

In the first few verses in chapter 10, Jesus speaks of himself as “the gate for the sheep.” (John 10:7 NRSV) There is a strong link between the images of the shepherd and the gate. On the Judean plains, it was common for the shepherd to live with the sheep. The shepherd would lead the animals to good grazing and water. At night the animals would be led to a safe enclosure, often made of stone or brambles. The shepherd would stand at the opening of the enclosure as the sheep entered, checking for any injured or missing sheep. Once all were in the safety of the pen, the shepherd would lay down in the opening, literally becoming the gate and protector of the sheep.

3. *What comfort does this imagery of Jesus as the gate for the sheep bring?*

Note the relationship between the shepherd and the sheep. “He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.” (John 10:3 NRSV) “I know my own, and my own know me.” (John 10:14 NRSV) “They will listen to my voice.” (John 10:16 NRSV) Familiarity, intimacy, and care are characteristics of the relationship. This is contrasted with the thief who comes to kill or destroy (John 10:10) and the hired hand who has no ownership in the sheep and runs away when danger comes.

4. *How does Jesus extend compassion to those whom he knows?*

Jesus adds a new characteristic to the imagery of a shepherd – the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (John 10:11) With this attribute, the Old Testament imagery of the shepherd and the suffering servant are brought together. The thief takes the life of the sheep; the good shepherd gives his life on their behalf. Later in John’s Gospel, Jesus identifies such self-sacrifice as the greatest love that can be shown to others (John 15:13). And then Jesus embodies this characteristic of the good shepherd as he gives his life on the cross.

5. *If Jesus would use a contemporary image to describe his point, what might it be?*

6. *What is the key message of this text?*

word among us

The woman in the hospital bed was in tears. Her husband and daughter had gone home to eat lunch, and she needed to be moved from the bed to a chair. Her body was racked with pain. Nurses and attendants tried to offer their aid, but they didn't know how best to help or where to hold her without hurting her. Her cry rang out in the corridor, "I want someone who knows me!"

In an age when extended families are often separated by miles or strained relationships; in a time when we are known (or more accurately "identified") by a driver's license number, a Social Security number, a student identification number, or an employee number – we yearn for intimacy. We yearn for the familiar – for someone with whom we are comfortable and accepted. We yearn to be known. The theme song from the TV show *Cheers* captured this yearning well. "Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name, and they're always glad you came.... You want to go where everybody knows your name."

1. *In what ways do you yearn to be known?*

Jesus' words speak to the heart of our yearning. "I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me." (John 10:14 NRSV) His words remind us that our human yearnings to be known find fulfillment in him. In Jesus we find intimacy, acceptance, compassion, and care. To him, we are known by name.

2. *Think of a time when you were called by name. How did you feel?*

3. *Describe your relationship with the good shepherd Jesus.*

Jesus knows us – our wants, our needs, our strengths, our weaknesses. He knows that without a shepherd, we would be lost. He knows that without a savior, we would be lost. And so he becomes both shepherd and savior for us – leading, guiding, and giving his life for the sheep so that we are known and found.

4. *How does it feel to have a shepherd caring for you?*

5. *In what ways might you spend time with this shepherd in the coming week?*

As shepherd and savior, Jesus brings us together as one flock. The community of the church is gathered because we are known. We may not know each other by our full name, but we know a part of each person's name: *child of God*. We hear a common voice. We follow a common shepherd.

6. *When have you felt the most connected with the flock, the community of the church?*

The final words of commendation prayed in the funeral liturgy remind us of this wonderfully good news that we are known by the good shepherd. As the dearly departed is commended to God, these words are spoken: *Acknowledge, we humbly beseech you, a sheep of your own fold, a lamb of your own redeeming....*" (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, page 283) Even at death, there is someone who knows us by name. THANKS BE TO GOD!

Prayer

Thank you, Good Shepherd, for knowing us by name. Amen

Dig Deeper

Psalm 23

last word

Take time this week
to call someone you don't know well by name.



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