

Readings for the day, May 3rd 2020 Scoops #31

This Sunday traditionally in the church is referred to as Shepherd Sunday.

The Readings: Acts 2: 42-47 Psalm 23 1 :Peter 2: 19-25

The Collect: O God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make us perfect in every good work to do your will, and work in us that which is well-pleasing in your sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen,

The Holy Gospel John 10: 1-15

Hello pilgrims! My sermon this morning will be very simple and hopefully nourishing! So let's jump right in talking about shepherds.

What did a shepherd do in the time of Jesus? Hard, low paying, undignified, dirty, backbreaking work tending the most beastly of animals in order to shear their wool and make a living. They were uneducated except for basic Torah, mostly illiterate, homeless and didn't smell so good. They had to keep their sheep alive at whatever cost. And yes, there was also an upside. There always was. They worked without on site managers ; they got to watch beautiful sunrises and sunsets and live out of doors...they got to really know their sheep and knew that their sheep would only follow them. But if Jesus ever wanted to impress the educated Pharisees, He'd never have chosen the title Shepherd to do it. In that culture, it is little wonder that most of them turned their noses up at that name.

It's not as if they hadn't heard God described that way before, however. The 23rd psalm known by heart by every one of them talked about the Shepherd who

led the sheep to green pastures beside still waters. Not an easy thing to do in a desert area where still water usually meant rancid water: where grass may be green but is never thick ‘ where the flock would generally need to be moved every two or three days. They’d heard about the Shepherd who used his rod and staff to “comfort” his sheep. The wisdom of Solomon told them that the rod was to be used to discipline a child, lest he be spoiled. The Pharisees certainly understood that! But they forgot that shepherds never used rods for discipline – rather only to stamp in the holes of the field to kill the poisonous snakes that otherwise might come out and kill the sheep. The Pharisees forgot a lot when they derided Jesus for choosing Shepherd to describe His vocation.

So He told them again. A good shepherd leads his sheep, they follow Him and not anyone else. He knows them by name and they know Him by voice. Jesus tells them He is also the Gate by which the sheep go in and out. By that, He does not mean simply a “doorway or entrance”. Here’s what it means. When the shepherd leads the sheep into the fold for the night, he finds brush or rocks to encircle them. Then he would lay down himself in the gap to serve as a living gate. Filling the gap with His own body meant that nothing and nobody got into the fold without first going through Him. Ever watchful and alert to sounds and scents, the shepherd would rise up at the first sign of trouble to drive away all people or animals which posed a danger to the sheep. Hirelings might run away and desert the sheep, but never the Shepherd/ When Jesus says He is the Gate, He is saying that He stands between all evil and His sheep and that He would, and in fact did, give His life for them.

Why? He tells us. So that His sheep could not just have life, but abundant life; not only survive but really live; not just exist but really thrive; not just stumble along but know the truth. What Jesus wants for human beings is precisely what every human being desires...abundant joyful peaceful life. Yet there are hirelings

that continue to tell the human sheep that abundant life only comes through new cars, fab jewelry, fame, money, influence, things and things and things and then stuff. We have the ministry, the opportunity, the challenge to present a different Way,” not things”, but a Person, who in addition to being our Shepherd is also the way, the truth and the life.

There is one more analogy in our Scripture. So far we have seen Jesus as Shepherd, Jesus as the gate, and now we consider Jesus as also being the pasture. He is the bread of Life that satisfies the hungry heart and the sparkling water that springs up to life eternal. Even in His shepherd metaphors, Jesus acts in Trinity. We have every reason this day to say thank you a million times to Jesus for being all three of these things for us. And so we do, alleluia!

A friend of mine in New Zealand once wrote about how sheep behave with their shepherds. We have to remember that sheep are cute, but not especially clever. If they graze an entire patch of grass down to the soil, they will not move from that pasture by themselves to go to another patch. They will only move when the Shepherd comes to lead them. You can't drive sheep from behind, like you do with cattle, you have to walk ahead of them. And you have to have one more thing: The Right Voice. If someone who is not their particular shepherd comes along and gets in front and murmurs to them, then calls Follow Me, they just stand there. They will only respond to the voice of the true shepherd. Most farms get them used as lambs to a few voices, but only the voices they know will get them moving. Later in John, ch 10 vs 27-28 Jesus says “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me, and I give them eternal life. No one will snatch them out of My hand.”

So how do we come to recognize the voice of our Shepherd? In the Word of God. When we learn and digest and live in the Scriptures we can recognize false voices....voices who are saying things Jesus would never say...and we can walk

confidently following Him. He puts Himself between all evil and our souls. And He will absolutely see us safely home, in His time, to live in the household of God.

Thanks be to God and amen.

Judie+

PRAYER OF RESPONSE:

Gentle Shepherd, come and lead us, for we need your help to find our way.

Gentle Shepherd, come and feed us, for we need your grace from day to day.

There's no other we can turn to , lest we are led astray

Gentle Shepherd, come and love us, teach us what to do and say.

May the God of peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds fixed on the love of God and His Son Jesus Christ, and the blessing of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit be upon you and remain with you this day and always. Amen.