

John 10:11-18
St. Marks's - April 21, 2023
Fourth Sunday of Easter
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Good Shepherd

Hear his voice. Know his voice. Follow where he leads and he will watch over us always. Jesus is, "the good shepherd" and everything that means. The good shepherd that will save us from the damnation of evil always.

Leading up to this story he has just given sight to a blind man and Pharisees are doubting the truth of his miracle. and doubting him.

Next, the Pharisees go after the man's parents who quite quickly refuse to support their son's testimony. Not because they don't know it to be true (they do), but because they are afraid of what the Pharisees will do to them.

What we just heard in our gospel lesson is Jesus speaking in reaction to the drama that just took place. The drama of the Pharisees' doubt and the parents' rejection of their son's healing.

Sadly, for the Pharisees and for all those who doubt Jesus, they miss the life-giving message of the scriptures. The message of the Messiah. The Messiah who is right in front of them.

When we hear Jesus say,

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep.

I imagine Jesus likening the hired hand to the parents who abandoned their son to the Pharisees.

Even when those we hold most dear fail us Jesus will not. He claims us as his own now and always. Hear his voice. Know his voice. Follow his voice and he will watch over us always.

The good shepherd, Jesus., protects the sheep. Protects us. from the wolf., from Satan.

I've spent far more time with wolves. than I have with sheep. There was a time in my life when I was acquainted with a refuge for wolf-dogs (these animals were far more wolf than dog). One particular day I was able to go into the enclosure of a pair of these majestic animals. Wolves are beautiful, very attractive creatures and even the smaller of the gray wolf variety are noticeably larger than an adult German Shepherd.

One of the two wolves that day sat patiently as I petted his soft, luxurious fur and then I forgot that this was not a dog. I knelt down, put my arms around him, and felt his fur on my face. Just about then I felt a deep growl growing inside him. I released my hold and back away before I heard the growl.

Nothing bad happened that day, but our reading reminds me that danger is often hidden behind beauty. I was reminded that something that looks so inviting, cuddly, and familiar might be the end of us.

Satan looks for cracks in our character. Satan looks for opportunities to turn something we expect to do no harm into the death of our souls.

The good shepherd is our defense. The good shepherd knows each of us by name and calls us to hear his voice. To know this voice. He beckons us to follow his voice and he will watch over us always.

Jesus says,

“...there will be one flock, one shepherd.”

And he also says,

“I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice.”

Our community will grow as Jesus gathers his flock.

If we revisit the wolf for a moment we remember that it is the wolf (Satan) who snatches and scatters the sheep (us). It is in community where we are safest

when we stick together and rely on one another for friendship, encouragement, and growth in Christ Jesus.

It is in community that we learn how to recognize the voice of Jesus, to recognize the good shepherd, and to reject and shy away from the wolves that threaten us.

We are called to hear his voice, to know his voice, and to follow his voice.

In a great act of love when we stray or stumble; when we are separated from the flock Jesus will find us and lovingly shepherd us back, to himself, to the body of Christ that is his own.

In the words of Jesus,

“I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father.

We are claimed by Jesus. We are his own and we know him. We know him more and more when we invest the time to gather together in worship, study, and fellowship.

The end of this morning’s reading foretells the death and resurrection of Jesus when he says,

“For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”

Jesus laid down his life for us as our own good shepherd.

He did this of his own accord. The power to do so was his and he had the power to take it up again. We know that is what he did.

Our part in all of this is made clear in this tale of the good shepherd. It is to hear his voice, to know his voice, and to follow his voice.

Jesus watches over us as our loving savior, protecting us, and caring for us always and forever.