

Title: Good Shepherd Sunday

John 10:11-18 (John 10:1-10)

Today is Good Shepherd Sunday. In today's Gospel speaks about Jesus being the Good Shepherd. Jesus frequently refers to us as sheep and himself as our shepherd. He also refers to himself as "the gate." The gate is the guard to good pastures. The gate grants security to all those within. None who belong in the sheep pen will stray out past the gate. None who seek evil will pass in through the gate, into the pen. These are supposed to be words of comfort to us. We are his sheep. We belong to him. He will protect us. Amen!

You know the name "Good Shepherd" is a powerful one, but I think as Americans we miss the macho aspect of the image. We see images of the good shepherd gently caring for his sheep. But I think we miss the idea of shepherd as guard. I think the American equivalent of the Shepherd should be the cowboy. The American Cowboy, riding his horse on a cattle drive driving his cattle along the trail making sure none stray. He rears his horse to a stop on the rim of the canyon. He shifts his weight in his saddle, weary from the cattle trail. One finger pushes his hat up on his head. A thousand head of cattle pass behind. A thousand miles of trail lie before him. A thousand women would love to hold him, but none do, because "he lives to drive cattle." His best friend is his horse, and his strength is his grit. Hard riding. Slow talking. He is.... the American cowboy. This too, was the description of a shepherd. He, too, was rugged. He slept where the jackals howled and worked where the wolves prowled. Never off duty. Always alert. He needed no gun for he was deadly with his staff. Like the cowboy, the roof of his house was the stars and the pasture was his home. He is the Biblical Shepherd, a man's man!

An excellent analogy but as it turns out that is where the similarities end. You see, there are major differences as well. The shepherd loves his sheep. The shepherd cared for his sheep. It's not that the cowboy doesn't appreciate the cow; it's just that he doesn't know the animal. He doesn't even want to. You never seen a picture of a cowboy caressing a cow. But a shepherd, a shepherd cares for his sheep. Why the difference? Simple. The cowboy leads the cow to slaughter. The shepherd leads the sheep only to be shorn of its wool. The cowboy wants the meat of the cow. The shepherd wants the wool of the sheep. The cowboy leads the cows to death. The shepherd wants his sheep to live and to prosper. And so, they treat the animals differently. The cowboy drives the cattle. The shepherd leads the sheep. A herd has a dozen hired cowboys. A flock has one shepherd. The

cowboy wrestles, brands, herds, and ropes. The shepherd leads, guides, feeds, and anoints. The cowboy whoops and hollers at the cows. The shepherd calls each sheep individually by name. A shepherd loves his sheep. A good shepherd goes ahead of his sheep to show them that everything is all right.” And the sheep follow their shepherd... and him only.

We, humans, are like sheep. It is in our nature to follow something. This is true for all humans. This is especially true regarding spiritual things. Unfortunately, when it comes to spiritual things the people of this world are like sheep without a shepherd. They are blind to the good Shepherd, Jesus. For this reason, their spiritual hunger leads them into all manner of crazy stuff:

- magic Crystals
- astrology
- scientology,

all in an effort to understand the spiritual, to experience the spiritual. Oh, they may give a feeling of the spiritual, a sense of understanding of the spiritual world, but ultimately, they are powerless. Ultimately, they do nothing about the things which really count in this world, or in the next.

It is in our nature to follow things. but Jesus said: “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.” What does it mean to hear Jesus’ voice? God sometimes works through our conscience, through the words of our brothers and sisters in Christ, through music, in our worship. But there is one clear place where we can clearly hear God’s call. The Bible! It is there we clearly hear the words of our Lord. It is there where he has clearly identified himself. It is there that the promises of eternal life have been clearly given. It is here where we come face to face with the important things of the spiritual world. Jesus is the Good shepherd, He calls us to follow him, and him only.

Why should we follow Jesus? Primarily we follow Jesus because we belong to Jesus. That’s the main answer: “we belong to Him.” Sheep follow the shepherd because they belong to him. The sheep did not join his flock. They were given to him. They were bought by him. We are Jesus’ sheep because God gave us to Him. He knows us. Jesus bought us with his very blood when he died on the cross for our sins. Therefore, our very purpose for living springs from our relationship with Jesus. For the Christian, you will never be truly happy you will never be truly at peace you will never truly know your purpose in life unless you actively following your Lord. We follow because we belong to Jesus.

But there's more. We follow, not only because we belong to him, but we follow because it is safe to follow Him. Our shepherd knows his sheep. He knows personally each sheep which were given to him and he protects them. Consequently, we follow Jesus because he protects us. He is the good shepherd who lays down his life for us. He is our guard. I love this story illustrating the shepherd as guard. George Adam Smith, a 19th century biblical scholar tells of traveling one day in the holy land and coming across a real shepherd and his sheep. He began talking with him. The shepherd showed him the fold into which the sheep were led at night. It consisted of four walls, with one way in. Smith asked him, "This is where they go at night?" "Yes," said the shepherd, "and when they are in there, they are perfectly safe." "But there is no gate," said Smith. The shepherd looked at him with a knowing smile: "I am the gate." Smith looked at him and asked, "What do you mean you are the gate?" The shepherd replied: "When the light has gone, and all the sheep are inside, I lie in that open space. No sheep ever goes out but across my body, and no wolf comes in unless he crosses my body. I am the gate." Jesus used the same analogy when he said: "He is the gate." Jesus is the Good Shepherd who protects his sheep. No sheep ever goes out but across His body, and no wolf comes in unless he crosses His body." Therefore we need not fear any attack upon us. "Jesus is the gate." We follow Jesus because he is the good shepherd who protects us. He protects us from the Satan and his demons. He protects us from the temptations of this world. He protects us from all who would do us spiritual harm.

Lastly, we follow Jesus, because he has gone before us to show us it is safe.... so we need not fear the future. Just as a good shepherd goes ahead of his sheep to show them that everything is all right." Jesus, Our good shepherd has gone ahead of us to show us that everything is all right. In the most scariest of places - death, Jesus has gone ahead of us. When Jesus rose from the dead on Easter, he showed that death was defeated. From Ps 23, ye thou I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me. When we take our final walk into the valley of the shadow of death, where none of our loved ones will be able to walk with us where no human on Earth can guide us... Jesus Christ will be there. He can guide us because he has gone ahead of us. We follow Jesus because he has gone before us in places where no man has gone before. We follow Jesus because, he has gone ahead of us to show us that everything is all right.

We follow Jesus because he calls us. We follow Jesus because he owns us. We follow Jesus because he protects us. We follow Jesus because he has gone ahead of us to show us that everything is all right. Jesus is the good shepherd, we are the sheep of his pasture who follow him. Amen

However, not everyone follows Jesus. Not everyone has Jesus as their shepherd. Many people out there in this world have no shepherd. They are totally ignorant of the Good Shepherd. They wander like sheep without a shepherd. and when Satan comes to attack, they have no defense. and at the end of their life they do not see heaven. There is no hope. God is calling us to invite others into the protection of his sheepfold. Jesus is calling us to introduce our shepherd to the sheep of this world. You know the shepherd. You know the shepherd who will protect us. You know the Shepherd who brings eternal life and a hope for those who suffer in this world. There are so many people wandering around without knowing the Shepherd and they are hurting. Sometimes they are hurting and they don't even know it. They think, that's just the way life is. Let them know the shepherd. Make friends with them. As they come to know you, they will come to know the Shepherd and he will bring them meaning. He will bring them security and protection. He will bring them hope. Let them know the Good Shepherd.