

HOW GOOD IS THE GOOD SHEPHERD TO YOU?

(John 10:1 - 10)

Let Us Pray:

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear friends in Jesus,

Have you ever seen a mangy dog running around the streets, and wonder why its owner didn't take better care of it? It makes a lot of difference to a pet, as to whether it has an owner who cares about it, or whether he just sort of lets it run wild. When left to themselves animals can have a pretty rough time in the 'dog eat dog' world. There is truth to the idea that nature tolerates only the survival of the fittest.

An ancient shepherd made a big difference to his sheep. There was a considerable difference between the lives of sheep who run wild, and sheep who have a shepherd. This is the thought concentrated in today's Psalm 23, (a favourite with many): a sheep with a good shepherd is really blessed. Let's look at some of the things a good shepherd used to do.

The shepherd always finds food and water for the sheep. Should they stumble into briars or prickly bushes or bruise themselves on some rocks on the way, the shepherd who leads is always ready to nurse them with healing ointment.

Dangers are always near. Wild animals try to separate a sheep from the rest of the flock and destroy it. How comforting, then, to know that the good shepherd wards off predators with his staff. And at night the comforting surroundings of the sheepfold with the watchmen at the gate permitting nobody to enter, makes it possible for the sheep to lie down to sleep with complete confidence.

If storm clouds darken the horizon the shepherd will hurry the sheep into the shelter of the sheepfold. He will open the gate of safety for them and call each sheep in by name. And his voice will soothe them and comfort them until all is again calm and peaceful.

This is what it means to have a good shepherd. No wonder the sheep with a good shepherd are so much better off than those left to themselves.

But it doesn't always appear that way appear that way on the surface does it? The sheep who goes where he wants, who doesn't have to feel bound in a shepherd's direction, is the one who appears to be the freest of them all.

That's the way the prodigal son felt about it. He saw his father as a terrible shepherd because he placed restrictions on him. He insisted that he couldn't eat off just any old pasture, and told his father that he wanted to choose his own.

Or must we speak only of the prodigal son? Isn't it the very essence of what we call sin? We all want our freedom, often selfish freedom. Like the prodigal son or a sheep under the restrictions of a good shepherd, we feel bound in by all our duties. The God who promises to be a good shepherd to us appears to hamper our freedom instead, and holds us back from our flights into adventure and fun. **"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to our own way,"** is the way Isaiah describes our human life situation.

As a sort of test question ask yourself, "Just why do I sin?", if it is not because your freedom from the Good Shepherd seems so desirable. A good, definition of sin is a straying away from tile one who wants to care for us and love us. The grass looks so green in the forbidden pastures where poisonous weeds grow. Like little children we ignore the concerned eye of the Shepherd and go our own way.

So the question of life is: Under whose care will we place ourselves? Will we try to find our own way in the fickleness of life? Or will we trust the Good Shepherd's judgement and be free of all the worries and concerns of life.

When all is said and done the sheep who has a good shepherd has the best life by far. That sheep is the freest of all, because it doesn't need to worry about the poisonous plants and brackish water and wounded bodies and destructive enemies. In its captivity it is free from all those threatening dangers.

The secret, of course, is in having good shepherd. In the book called *The Little Prince*, a conversation between a fox and a little boy is recorded in which the fox says, *"I have no need for you. And you have no need of me. To you, I am nothing more than a fox like a hundred thousand other foxes. But if you tame me, then we shall need each other. To me you will be unique in all the world. To you, I shall be unique in all the world."* Or as the fox puts it even more briefly a little later on, *"Humans have forgotten this truth, but you must not forget it. You become responsible forever for you tamed."*

Our Good Shepherd is the one who has *'tamed'* all the forces that once held us captive, and then *'tamed'* us so that we **'might be his own and live under him in his kingdom'**. The very fact of the cross and what our Good Shepherd did for on that cross, tells us that He is the One whose voice we want to follow. We can follow his voice with confidence knowing that he will always be with us and on our side.

We want to hear his voice through an intimate fellowship with him at home and at Church. We want to hear his voice in the good days as well as the bad days. We hear his voice as we read and hear his life-giving Word.

We look forward to hearing his voice again when we will celebrate the Lord's Supper, and he will say us, '**Take and eat and drink; this is my body and blood given and shed for you for the forgiveness of all your sins. Now go and live as my special people, and share the good news.**' We share his voice at home with our family members and with our fellow Christian family members.

And when our last hour comes how important it is for us to know well the Good Shepherd, who will protect and guard and keep us as we go **through** the dark valley of death.

So now is the time to know the Good Shepherd. He has called you by your name. We are here to once more listen to his voice which says, "*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I come that you may have life and have it abundantly.*" As today's Reading from Acts puts it so well, "*By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls Jesus Christ.*" **Amen.**

Sermon by Pastor Graham Zweck
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