

The Fourth Sunday of Easter
May 7, 2017, Year A
St. Dunstan's Anglican Church, Largo, FL

Acts 2:42-47

Psalm 23

1 Peter 2:19-25

John 10:1-10

Alleluia! Christ is risen! *The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved”

To understand this parable, we need to understand the pastoral reference and define the players. Then we can better understand the point Jesus is making.

A sheepfold is a place for the sheep to be protected while they sleep. Sheep are utterly defenseless animals. They have no horns or sharp teeth. They can't kick. They can't run very fast or very far. They have no camouflage and are easily seen at a distance. They cannot climb, burrow or hide. They are not very bright or intelligent. They cannot live without a shepherd to lead them to pasture and protect them from danger.

God refers to us as sheep! Is there a dumber, weaker, more helpless animal in all of creation to which we might be compared? God is saying that we cannot take care of ourselves. We cannot find our way on our own.

In the Old Testament, Isaiah prophesied that “All we like sheep have gone astray,” meaning that every one of us needs a shepherd if we have any hope at all of finding our way into the presence of the Lord. Isaiah was a prophet to the people of God. A prophet is a person through whom God speaks to his people. Therefore God was and is telling his people, and now us, that we need a shepherd to find our way into the presence of the Lord.

In the New Testament we find the same reference to sheep to describe us, the people of God in our day. Jesus himself often compares us to sheep throughout the gospels that record his life and teaching, such as today's gospel reading from John.

But what a beautiful picture these metaphors represent when we look at the role of shepherd through the words of the 23rd psalm. Jesus is our shepherd.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. [There is a lot of peace knowing God is in charge.]

²He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters. [God provides for all our needs.]

³He restores my soul. [Jesus is our Savior.]

He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. [He provides peace now and forever.]

⁴ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil, for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they comfort me. [We can stand against the onslaught of the enemy because
we are completely protected.]

⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. [Everything is good.]

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house
of the LORD forever. [a guarantee from God that can never be taken away]

What a deal! When we remind ourselves of the amazing and incredible relationship we have with the Father, with Jesus himself as our shepherd and the Holy Spirit along for the ride to guide us in the details {think about that! Only Christians have the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus took care of the big picture on the cross so that we could once again come into the presence of the Father.}, when we remind ourselves of these things, how could there possibly be anything better? It's amazing!!

So let's get back to the gospel and the sheepfold. Jesus tells us that anyone who tries to enter the sheepfold by climbing over the wall is a thief and a robber. Using sheep and the sheepfold as an example, Jesus is telling us that anyone who tries to get into our lives by messing with our head or our emotions or through inappropriate relationships or any other means that does not square with Scripture is someone or something that is attempting to steal us away from God.

What do these thieves and robbers look like in our lives today? And what is our "sheepfold?" Our sheepfold is the security we have in Jesus Christ. Our sheepfold is our salvation, our peace, our strength, our joy – all of which come from God. Those who would rob us of these things are those who put distractions in front of us to entice us to stray off on our own without thinking of God's directions for how we should live our lives as recorded for us in the Bible.

And these distractions are often not people, but things: things like new ways of thinking and living that don't square with Scripture; recreation that is unholy; buying and possessing things we don't need just for the fun of it; vanity and pride that comes from status in wealth, profession or beauty. And the list goes on.

These kinds of things are called idols. An idol is anything that takes the place of God the most important thing in our lives. Idols in the Bible have names like Molech and Ashteroth, names that mean little or nothing to us today. Idols of our day have names like wealth, possessions, status, and even children when they are not raised properly.

The door Jesus is speaking of is the entrance into the presence of God. God lives in heaven. Therefore Jesus is the way to get into heaven. Can Jesus be any more clear than that? Jesus is telling us that there is only one way to get into heaven, and that is through him.

When he said that others who enter the sheep fold by climbing over the wall rather than coming through the door are thieves, he was making the point that not only is he the door, but he is the only door. Others will offer any number of ways to find happiness and satisfaction only to be proven worthless in the end. The writer of Ecclesiastes says "there is nothing new under the sun,"

and he is right. Jesus is the same today as he was yesterday 2,000 years ago, and he will still be the same 2,000 years in the future, if he waits that long to return.

To put this Scripture to work, we need to recognize how it should affect our lives every day. In our Wednesday night group study, we are discussing how to be more intimate with God through conversational prayer. God the Father wants to be close to us. He wants us to talk to him just like we would talk to an earthly father who was the perfect dad in every sense, because God the Father actually is good and perfect in every sense.

When we think of Jesus as our good shepherd, we know we will not go too far astray before he reigns us in and redirects our steps. He wants the best for us, and life lived in the presence of God, both now in this world and for all eternity in the next, is a pretty good definition of the best.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! *The Lord is risen indeed!* **Alleluia!**

And now unto you, O Lord, be ascribed all might, majesty, power and dominion. In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.