**“Good Shepherd”**

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Psalm 23

Acts 4:1-12

1 John 3:16-24

John 10:11-18

Easter 4

Jesus said: “I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. I am the Good the Shepherd. I know My own and My own know Me.”

Christ **is** risen! He is **risen, indeed!** Alleluia! Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and from our Lord, and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Bridge

I seldom write in my Bible, but I have written above John chapter 10 that **this is Jesus’ funeral sermon for Himself**. I visualize, therefore, the Sheep being carried by the Shepherd as, first, **Jesus entrusted to the arms and care of His Father**. It, then, (after that) shows **His arms holding each one of us**. And, for me (this week) I’m drawn to that picture on the bulletin as it’s Joe Crump so held still in Jesus’ arms. In this life and beyond it, the **held “sheep”** image **reigns true** and even **clearer** for the time after the **confusion of this world** so maybe, then (if we need the animal vision), **fluffier we are on the outside of our skin** and, **most certainly, much the warmer with the, then, obvious touch of the arms and chest skin and shoulders of the Lord Jesus**. ….

“**Sheep**” is a designation that can hold no **problematic ego**. **Jesus, Himself**, came “to **serve and not to be served** … He said so, and knew His sheepish role well”. He was perfectly obedient as “**servant** **to the will of the Father; and that** **sheepish (lambish) servanthood took Him** **all the way to a death on a cross**”. He **commended** His Spirit on the cross (and for every step of His earthly time) to His Father. He was perfect “sheep” to the Father’s Shepherding. And a “sheep” is not a “**self-made man or woman**” … even Jesus voiced His Source as the Father. For Him, even, and certainly us, here’s no room for “patting ourselves on the back” if we understand the reality of human “**sheepishness**”. Sheep we literally all are as they’re defined (before they’re ever defined in the 4-legged animal version) as **needy and often dangerously oblivious … wandering off from where we’re fed and protected and kept safe, venturing into danger we’re mostly not aware of and have no defenses for, but corralled by One who appropriately does that**. In other words, there’s no **power and prestige** in **being a “sheep”** … and **everyone is one** … the wise only **acknowledging the fact** … **shepherding** being the **only, then, variable**.

Text

Which brings us to our Gospel text. Jesus says, twice, that **He** is “the **Good Shepherd**” of “sheep” who should “know Him and His voice, listening to it”. He’s “the Good Shepherd” rather than something else … and explains **why that is and for what purpose it’s available**. “**Goodness**” is, both, a **point of differentiation** and a **necessity for us “sheep’s” welfare**. **Love** and **Goodness** is synonymous and knowing Him is the only way to really know true love, because all real Goodness and, therefore full love is sourced and gained to be given or received **by Him**. **He’s IT**, and it is always **expressed in action** and **care with a reason for that care**.

He **died for us** **… gave His life up for “sheep” who needed that to happen or else they’d die**. In that death, He **bought** all sheep, **took possession by purchase into ownership** and that called **redemption** with a transaction done in His own blood as the **price for that purchase**. **Everyone** was paid for in full. “**The** sheep” are **the whole world of people / all** Jesus “**laid down His life for** **… the sheep**”. The price-tag for that was a stiff one. Gold or silver would not have been adequate, but the “precious blood of God’s own Son”, **IT** was **sufficient** and **offered up**.

The Lord God in Jesus, then, is not a “**hired hand**” but the **Owner** (the **Maker of the** **purchase** **by the transaction of His own bloodshed**). **Invested** that much, He **cares, therefore (and obviously) for those “all” that He’d came to own**. This He contrasted with **care-takers, or “hired hands”**. He **owns the sheep**, considering **each and the whole** a **possession worth the precious value of His efforts …** **sheep now with “the Good Shepherd” available to be gathered to**.

“**Sheep**” and “**Good Shepherd**” is so **familiar** a description of humanity and the loving Lord and Savior that we almost **miss enjoying it for its familiarity**. We call “**analogy**” what’s first “**literal**” and, so, **fail** **to associate our every move with sheepish carefulness and cognizance of the whereabouts of the Shepherd** and we **fail** **to enjoy Jesus in the intimacy and proximity of the every-moment-shepherding that He’s close enough to do** … and **that’s** the **visual and learning challenge** …

Application

… So the Lord as **“my Shepherd” (me wanting of Him that)** and I admitting that **I’m** **a sheep needing appropriate shepherding**, **are** the **acknowledgements of faith that (with Baptism’s purchase finale) signs the deed of His forever-care in ink**.

While Good Shepherd and sheep are literal designations for people and the Lord (as He has displayed Himself in sacrificial action), the **ways by which** a shepherd of the animal-version relates to his charge and they to him cast a **visual for our learning … so I leave you with that**. If reviewing the **middle-eastern example of this helps** in sustaining **our own vision of this in the Lord and us**, then here it is:

“In selecting pasture for the flock, it is an absolute necessity that plenty of water is provided there. Flocks often are stationed near a stream of running water, yet the sheep can be afraid of water that is running too quickly or that is riled up with mud. So the shepherd looks for **pools** of water that provide a **quiet place** where the sheep can quench their thirst.

“More than one flock may be kept in the same fold. Often flocks are even **mixed while being watered at the well**. No attempt is made to separate them then. **When it is** **time to separate the sheep**, one shepherd after another will stand up and call out to them in a **familiar way**. The sheep will **lift their heads**, and after a scramble each one will **begin following his master**.

“The eastern shepherd has a **personal relationship with his sheep**. Not only does the shepherd **know his sheep by name**, he **never drives them, but leads them instead**. This does not mean that he is always in front of them. He **may walk by their side** or sometimes **follow behind**.

“The shepherd is **so acutely aware of each of his sheep** that often he doesn’t even need to **count them**. He is able to **feel** the absence of any one of his sheep. When a shepherd of Lebanon was asked how he could keep track of his sheep if he didn’t count, he replied, ‘If you were to put a cloth over my eyes and bring me any sheep and only let me **put hands on its face**, I could **tell in a moment if it was mine or not**.

“The shepherd **plays with his sheep to pass the hours**. A shepherd does this by **pretending to run away** (being briefly out of sight). The sheep will soon **overtake him and surround him, jumping and twisting with delight**. The sheep **know their shepherd will not leave them or turn them away**.”

But one last word about the **“hired hand”**. It’s been said that our **non-vocational** relationships (that is, our relationships not dedicated in a giving or receiving mode on the Lord’s **unbusinesslike** behalf) have a **business component to them**. It is, therefore, largely of **“transactional benefit to us” either for our companionship or fun or need to accomplish something specific that we relate to others in most scenarios**. Jesus used the “**hired hand**” designation to point out how **different He (and those truly for-Him) are**. The care of an **owner** makes **precious** what’s owned. And we (for Him) **have value** … and **are useful**. We may be placed in “**under-shepherd**” roles to serve **as the Good Shepherd’s ambassador** for a situation (like **parenthood** as one vocation), but we only serve **appropriately (as under-shepherd to the Good Shepherd)** as we truly **provide His hands and feet and voice**. Otherwise (outside of the vocational service for the Savior), we’re also just “hired hands”.

We are beginning a Sunday School Bible Class next Sunday on **exactly** **that topic (of the Good Shepherd and how He’s still at work)** so I invite you to gather with me as we see **Him** **differentiated from the work of “hired hands”**.

We thank God that our Good Shepherd **is risen and living!** He (Christ Jesus) **IS** **risen, indeed! Alleluia!** Thanks be to God for that. In **His name, +Jesus**. **Amen**.