



Lakeside Sermons

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina
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JULY 18, 2021
THE EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Know Any Good Shepherds? II Samuel 7:1-13; Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

As you know, I have often wondered why Jesus didn't tell more parables or make comparisons that involved carpentry, his assumed profession for many years. He did tell that one parable about building a house on sand or rock which would involve a carpenter, but such illustrations are rare. I would expect something like: the kingdom of God is like a block of wood on which the carpenter cuts and chisels and whittles day after day until he finally polishes the finished product and presents it to its new owner—a beautiful bowl for washing the dusty feet of the man's guests. Instead Jesus told parables about weddings and dinner parties, investing resources, dealing with difficult children, and farming. He told lots of parables related to farming and at times I have wondered if Jesus had been a farmer instead of a carpenter.

One thing I do know is that Jesus was very observant. He paid attention to what he saw and heard. He noticed what people did and how they lived. It occurred to me that a good carpenter would know a lot about farming because who else would make the yokes and plows and hoes and pitchforks? Carpenters would be involved in building barns and bigger barns. A good carpenter might be called upon to build sheepfold and perhaps even to craft rods and staffs and other critical equipment for people in the farming business.

I guess its not really surprising that Jesus talked a lot about things that had to do with sowing seeds and harvesting crops, dealing with difficult soil and persistent weeds, working and waiting, grain and grapes and goats and sheep. Because he was a good carpenter, he understood the lives of his customers. As God Incarnate, he understood the lives of people in general.

For instance, for several weeks we have been hearing about Jesus boating back and forth over the Sea of Galilee. He and his disciples did a lot of walking, but if he wanted to get away from the crowds and find a remote spot quickly, he often took a boat. That is what we just heard. Jesus had sent his disciples out on a mission to share the gospel and rely completely on the kindness of other people. When they returned, he recognized both their excitement and their weariness—kind of like a Friday afternoon of Workcamp!

He suggested that they all get away for a while to rest and reflect on what had happened. They climbed in their boats and made their way down the coast to a remote spot. The problem was that someone noticed them in the boats and spread the word so that by the time Jesus and his friends pulled up on shore, a big crowd was waiting for them.

I might have said, “Keep rowing, boys!” and glided on past the crowd to find another spot further down the coast, but not Jesus. He didn’t roll his eyes or say, “Here we go again!” or scold the people and complain about needing some time alone. Jesus’ reaction was all compassion. The people in that crowd—many of them sick or incapacitated in other ways—had walked and run and limped along the shore to see and hear and, hopefully, touch him. They wanted to be healed and taught and fed. Mark tells us that Jesus had compassion for all those people because they appeared to him as sheep without a shepherd.

Jesus often gravitated to the image of a shepherd. In John’s gospel, Jesus refers to himself as the good shepherd and explains why he fits that bill. A good shepherd enters by the gate of the sheepfold instead of trying to sneak in like a thief. He is able to lead the sheep because they know his voice and trust him. Moreover, he takes his place as the gate of the sheepfold, literally laying down his life, so that any intruder, human or beast, would have to go through him to get to the sheep. Jesus talked about not abandoning lost sheep and rejoicing when they are found. For a carpenter, Jesus knew a lot about shepherding.

That is not mere coincidence. The person of the good shepherd is an intentional image that Jesus claimed and the gospel writers passed on to us. For centuries, the shepherd had been the predominant metaphor for Israel’s religious and political leaders. Moses and King David were both shepherds. It was while tending his flock that Moses encountered God in the burning bush and, like a shepherd, he led his people to freedom. It was with one of his shepherd’s tools that David defeated the giant Goliath and sent the Philistine army running home. It was like a shepherd that Moses led the people of Israel through the desert and prepared them for entry into the Promised Land. And it was like a shepherd that David used his harp to soothe the tormented spirit of Saul and then, when necessary, used his courage to protect Israel from Saul and other enemies.

The prophets evaluated Israel’s kings according to whether or not they were good shepherds of the people. Over and over they assured the Israelites that God would one day provide for them the Good Shepherd to lead them. In fact, the prophets were, themselves, shepherds of the people.

Earlier, we heard the story of how King David wanted to honor God with a permanent house in which to dwell, a building where the Ark of the covenant could safely reside. Through the prophet Nathan, David learns that God does not need a house of wood or stone. Instead, God wants a *bayit*, a family, a household of faith which is the Hebrew people. God desires, not a physical structure, but a covenant relationship that is unconditional, flexible, movable, and based solely on God's faithfulness. What Nathan tells David God wants is a foreshadowing of the Church which is not a building, but a people, a family of faith. In many ways, Nathan becomes King David's shepherd. He counsels him in which course he should take and, when necessary, confronts him with the brutal truth of his sin. Nathan the prophet-shepherd guides David the shepherd-king through the valley of deepest darkness into the fields of green grass beside still waters. God not only provides Jesus as the Good Shepherd to lead us all; God also provides us with good shepherds to help us day by day.

Fred Craddock, who grew up dirt poor in Humboldt, Tennessee, and became one of the most influential teachers and practitioners of preaching our nation has known, encouraged his congregations to take on a little project.

"Do you have a piece of paper?" he would ask. "Well use your worship bulletin. Would you write in the margin somewhere or at the bottom these words: *I thank my God for all my remembrance of you.* And write a name. You choose the name. You remember the name. Write another name, and another name, and another name.

. . .

Keep the list, because to you it's not a list. In fact, the next time you move, keep that. Even if you have to leave . . . everything else, keep that with you.

In fact, when . . . you leave the earth, take it with you . . . When you get to the gate, St. Peter's going to say, "Now, look, you went into the world with nothing, you've got to come out of it with nothing. Now what've you got?"

And you'll say, "Well, it's just some names."

"Well, let me see it."

"Well now, it's just some names of folks I worked with and folks who helped me."

"Well, let me see it."

"This is just a group of people that, if it weren't for them, I'd have never made it."

He'll say, "I want to see it." And you'll give it to him, and he'll smile and say, "I know all of them. In fact, on my way here

to the gate I passed a group. They were painting a great big sign to hang over the street. And it said, "Welcome home."¹

I suggest you do the same thing except that I suggest you title your list, "My Shepherds." Write down the names of the people who have shepherded you through life. It might be your parents or the parents of a friend. I suspect you will have the name of a teacher or two or three. Friends, co-workers, even strangers whose names you do not know might make your list with only a date or location or direction in which they pointed you. Who are the Nathans in your life? Who has acted like Jesus for you? Who has looked upon you with compassion and helped feed and heal you so you could get on with your life? Who are the good shepherds in your life?

It's fine if you want to jot down a few of those names right now on the front of your order of worship. I thought of a few of my own.

Quincy Smith was my high school principal. He was tall and no nonsense and got some real problems ironed out in our school. He summoned me to his office one day of my senior year. I was editor of the yearbook and a few of us on the staff thought it would be fun to include a parody of the school newspaper in our annual. It wasn't a bad idea, but the first draft turned out to be little more than the crude and cruel humor of highschool boys. Mr. Smith went over all of this material with me and reminded me that the yearbook would go all over the community and last well into the future. Were the jokes and fake stories things that I would want to be remembered for? Was that how I thought he wanted his school to be thought of in the community? While I was mad that he made us rewrite everything, I was even more embarrassed by what we had attempted to do. He pointed me to the right path which offered truly creative humor that was not offensive or hurtful. His name is on my Shepherd List.

Juanita Bosdell had cancer of the brain. I visited her often the summer after I graduated from college. We talked about a lot of things and she wanted to know why I was interested in becoming a minister. I explained all of those things about wanting to help people and share God's love and be a part of the work of the church. My only misgiving, I said, was that I did not like to move and preachers tended to move often. She reminded me that her husband had been in the military and they had moved all over the world. She talked about friends she had made and experiences she had that would not have occurred if she had stayed in one place. "You are going to meet people and do things that your friends who stay here will never experience," she said.

¹Fred B. Craddock, *Craddock Stories*, Mike Graves and Richard F. Ward, eds. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), 152-153.

“Your life will be richer because you move, not because you stay put.” She was right. Each place we have lived has given us good friends and rich experiences that I would never trade. I would not be here today if I had not listened to Mrs. Bosdell and I would have missed out on knowing some of the best people in the world!

Paul was a young man who joined our church in Savannah. It seemed that all odds were stacked against him. His family asked a lot of him and gave little in return. He had big dreams of becoming a photographer but probably did not have the talent. Nothing he tried seemed to succeed. I determined that I was going to help Paul find his way to a better life. Along with others in the church we helped him enroll in college. We arranged for a nice apartment where he could live. We helped him find employment and transportation and other resources. But we never helped him learn how to do those things for himself. I never helped him find a true friend. I never attempted to understand the obstacles that always fell in his way. I never really considered what it was that was best for Paul—only what I thought was good for him.

Paul is one of my shepherds because he guided me to understand that people are not projects. Unless we develop true relationships, our good intentions and good works may be for naught. When we take the time and make the effort to get to know the person in front of us, we discover how a good shepherd can best help him or her.

My shepherd list is quite long and the margins are filled with notes and comments, questions and praise. God has been abundantly good to me through the people who have shepherded me through life.

Do you know any good shepherds? Of course you do. Like Jesus, they look at you with compassion. Like Jesus, they feed and heal and encourage you. They let you know when you are doing something wrong and help you find the right way to go. You trust them because you know their voice. You know their heart. You know they will look out for you. They protect you and provide for you. They want the best for you.

Do you know any good shepherds? I’m sure you do. Your list is probably pretty long. For whom are you a good shepherd? How do you allow your compassion to be the gate that provides both safety and opportunity to the people in your life? Are you a good shepherd? I’m sure your name is on someone else’s list . . . as it should be. Amen.

July 18, 2021

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

This day has dawned bright and beautiful and warm—a perfect summer day for us, O God. We are grateful because we realize that today, like yesterday and tomorrow, is a gift to us. Help us to make the most of this day whether it be taking the rest that we need, communing with you in prayer and worship, nourishing our relationships with family and friends, or simply opening our lives even more to your presence in this day.

We know that good weather alone does not make a good day, so we pray for everyone who awoke to another day of challenge or fear or pain or want. People are sick. People are hurting. People are afraid for their lives. People are hungry for food, for a safe place to be, for work, for health, for love, for hope. Bring to all people the dawn of a new and good day when our truest needs are met and we can all enjoy the gifts of your grace.

We thank you for the opportunity our youth and adults had last week to make life a little better for some of our neighbors. We are grateful for the young people who learned how compassion can be offered in tangible ways and that there are so many good and loving people in our community that we do not yet know. We thank you for the adults who gave time and energy to be with our young people and for the insights they learned from our young friends. Continue to bless the efforts of our Workcamp ministry so that it helps to change not only our community, but us as well.

As a frightening new variant courses around the world, causing new Covid infections, we pray for all who are ill and for all who take care of them. We thank you for the vaccines that have been developed, for treatments that are evolving, and for new understanding of how important we are to one another. We are weary of this disease, O God, but give us the energy and wisdom to continue our vigilance and grant us the courage to do it together, we pray.

For people around the world who struggle for freedom, who long for a healthy meal and a safe home, who are weary of violence and abuse, who want to enjoy life that is full and complete, we offer our prayers, O God. Remind us that we are your household, a living temple in which you abide. Continue to dwell with us and through us as a blessing to everyone around us. Amen.