

Pastor T.C. Arnold
3rd Sunday of Easter
Ezekiel 34:11-16, John 10
April 26th, 2020

As if you hadn't figured it out already, the appointed readings for the 3rd Sunday of Easter are about The Shepherd. The Shepherd, here, in the Old Testament text, the Psalm, and the Gospel are one in the same. He's described as the GOOD Shepherd. There is only one GOOD Shepherd and we know who that is. We know it's Jesus – He is the GOOD Shepherd. So, identifying the shepherd is not our challenge. However, what the challenge may be for us is to rightly understand what this word "GOOD" actually means. "Good," is a word that is more ambiguous than we might think. Yet, it's important that we get it right – especially if we are going to understand what it means when the Bible speaks of the GOOD Shepherd.

By my count, according to Dictionary.com, there are more than forty ways that "good" can be used as an adjective in the English language. Not all of them can be applied to the Good Shepherd – maybe half. And, of course, Jesus didn't speak in English when He said of Himself, "I am the Good Shepherd." What we have in the original language is the Greek word *kalos*. And it's important to know what this word means and how it was used by Jesus. The reason, if Jesus is going to identify Himself with this adjective, we better know what it means and, more importantly, what it doesn't mean.

Have you ever heard someone say, "Jack is a good man," or "Samantha is a good woman"? Perhaps you yourself have used this terminology to describe someone you highly respect and care about. With more than forty ways to use the word "good" and we would probably struggle right now to come up with that many ways to define the word, one has to wonder what you or someone else really means when you call them good? And because this word means so many different things about a person's character, or attitude, or nature, it's important that we get it right when we talk about our Savior Jesus. Especially since He calls Himself the Good Shepherd.

There is this romantic notion about what we think Jesus means when He uses the word, "good" to describe Himself. In other words, goodness of the Shepherd – the GOOD Shepherd, abides in His affection for the sheep. In other words, Jesus is GOOD because He is gentle with us – He does not harm us. He gives us good words to live by and speaks to us in the kindest and gentlest ways. Jesus is good because He teaches us how to live good Christian lives and wants what is best for us. Because of His deep affection for us, Jesus is the GOOD Shepherd.

Now, to be fair, this understanding about our Lord is not foreign to the way we understand our Lord in the New Testament – nor in the Old Testament. God does in fact hold us in deep affection. He loves you like a Father loves his children and like a husband is to love his wife. But the Gospel text for today is not about this kind of "good." And thank God it's not, because what truly makes God good is the reason why He did all that He did for us. The reason why we call Jesus good is because we are not good and we desperately need the shepherd who is.

"How are you today," someone might ask. "I'm good," we respond. Are you? Are you "good"? What does that mean exactly? Perhaps you mean that you feel good. Perhaps you mean that you are well. Because you aren't good. Oh I know, comparatively we might measure up as "better" than others. That's usually our litmus test – how we stack up as compared to others who are "not so" good. We try to do good. And what we mean is that we try to be kind to others, not hurt others, be a good husband or wife – that sort of thing.

Yes, you might do “good,” but your condition is bad. You are a sinner through and through. You might be kind, and affectionate toward others and a loving person. But just like me and everyone else, your heart is filled with sin. Your thoughts are soiled. Your actions... maybe more in secret... show our true nature. You are sheep that have gone astray. You are a part of the Good shepherd’s fold that walks away from Him when you are set on what your sinful heart wants instead of what He wants for you. You might have an affection disposition toward others and even toward your Lord but your true self is condemned and worthy to receive only severe judgment for your patient and loving God.

So let’s take a look at what Jesus means when He calls Himself, “good.” And we go back to the Prophet Ezekiel in the Old Testament text to help us understand. Look at what the Lord will do – *“I, I myself will search for my sheep and I will seek them out... I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered... I will bring them out from the peoples... I will feed them... I will seek the lost and I will bring back the strayed.”* Beloved, this is not the affectionate or gentle “good” that our Jesus, our shepherd, is for us. This is “ever active” saving, faithful, sacrificial good that He happens to be.

In the Gospel text from John 10, we must pay attention to the key passage of the whole text: *“I lay down My life for the sheep.”* In this key text Jesus speaks about Himself, as the Good Shepherd, and has us pay more attention to His obedient sacrifice and less about His gentle affection. To be the Good Shepherd means that Jesus “will do” for you and me more than just express an emotion... a kindness... a smile... a gentle disposition toward us. The “Good” in the Good Shepherd means that Jesus loves us to death... an active love that carried Him to the cross. An active obedience to the Father’s demands in order to forgive you of all of your sins. This is what “good” means when Jesus says that He is the GOOD Shepherd.

Sinners who engage in the activity of sin... need an active Lord to actively forgive those sins. The activity of sin must stop. God calls Christians out of sin – to “not” sin – or to live “in” sin any longer. Repent, beloved in the Lord. The active forgiveness of our Lord endures forever. Repent and believe on Him. See His amazing, beautiful and yet horrific act of Divine love... that which makes Him Good above all else... for you.

The Prophet Ezekiel knew what kind of God the Messiah would be – an active... seeking... shepherd... kind of Messiah. That’s much different than what the people might have thought about what a Messiah... God Himself... would look like and do for His people. It doesn’t seem so foreign to us, because we know our God. We know Him... when we take to heart these words.... *The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.* With these words... *I will seek the lost and I will bring back the strayed...* with these words... *The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.*

This is what it means to be Good. To actively die for you. That’s what makes Jesus the Good Shepherd... the Greatest of all shepherds. You may do good things... but only Jesus can do, and has done, the greatest good for you. We need Him. By grace through faith we are marked as those who belong to the Good Shepherd. He promises to be ours. This is the best Good News of all. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.