

Pastor T.C. Arnold
3rd Sunday of Easter
John 10:11-16
April 10th, 2016

If you imagine a man, as dingy as a homeless person who hasn't had a bath in months, as smelly as anything that you have had the misfortune to catch a whiff, as absolutely unacceptable to the good graces of common society, then you have in your mind's eye a shepherd. A shepherd is the last thing you would want to be compared to. At times they must stay with their animals on the hillsides and the grassy plains.

The status of a shepherd was very limited. You see, in an agricultural home where there is farming and raising of sheep and animals, the duty of the shepherd was always given to the youngest. You might remember David, the shepherd boy. He was the one out with the sheep, because he was the youngest of Jesse's sons. And the youngest boy in the family always had the lowest status... until one younger than him is born, then he became the shepherd.

What makes our Gospel text for today remarkable is that Jesus uses one of his "I am" illustrations to call Himself a shepherd – the "good" shepherd. Yes, dingy, unkempt, smelly, unacceptable, and lowest member of the family shepherd. But you see, beloved in the Lord, that that is exactly the picture our Savior wishes to paint for us Christians. Jesus did not come to be viewed as the great majestic Lord praised and honored as one who came to be above all, the most esteemed, the most glorious, and the most beautiful. No, this is the picture of our Lord – "I am the good shepherd..." He comes to live among the sheep, who wander, who need to be fed, who need to be near living waters, who to be sheered – yes, their wool needs to be sheered. Sheep love to lay in their own feces. They need sheering. They need grooming. And by this we see how important the job of a shepherd is, yet how rejected by the whole of society he is as well.

And now it all becomes so very clear to us. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He knows His own and His own know Him. There is no beating around the bush. You are the sheep of our Savior's pasture. You are the ones he protects and lays down His life for. You are the one Jesus loves so much that He would stand His ground, take your punishment, and not back down when a crown of thorns was placed on His head, whips and chains hitting His back, face and side, and a heavy cross would be placed on His shoulders so He could carry His very own instrument of torture and death to Golgotha.

That's right, Jesus the Good Shepherd, would die for wandering sheep. You are a wanderer and yet the shepherd who was born for the task would take up the task of dying for you. You are a wandering sheep in the flock of Jesus. And I know what you do – because I do it too. You rationalize your wandering. You say, "as long as I come back to the sheep pen and show my allegiance to Jesus on Sunday morning, my wandering is okay." You say, "I'm not as bad as my neighbor, or that one man I read about or that one lady who did this or that..." You say this as if there are "degrees" to wandering away from Jesus. I will wander, but not too far. Sin is sin to our Savior. Our thoughts, words and deeds that lead us astray are just as painful to any degree than are the stripes, the crown and the nails placed through his hands and feet on Good Friday. We don't even understand the magnitude of our wandering. It is dangerous and I will tell you from personal experience why it is so dangerous.

There have been many people I have come into contact with who believe their "innocent" or "controlled" wandering is of no concern or consequence. They had gotten caught up into

something they never thought possible. They thought they can control their use of drugs – whether that be prescription or illicit – and then found themselves controlled by them – and then nothing else really mattered. It is the same thing with alcohol. It is the same thing with pornography. These offenses need not be so “illicit.” For example, maybe it’s laziness or even gossip or slander. It could be the same thing with shopping and spending too much, or texting and using social media obsessively, or even eating or sleeping. When do we have it under control? When does it become “out of control?” You think you know? I bet you don’t. And you suffer – those around you suffer – and so does your relationship with the Good Shepherd. You didn’t even notice it. “So what if I only make it to church twice a month when I use to make it to church each Sunday – I have it all under control,” you say. “I’m under control. My family is under control. My relationship with Jesus is under control.”

And so here is this man, not so accepted by the world. He has ratty clothes and he probably doesn’t smell so good. We are becoming less and less likely to want to eat next to him in the fancy restaurant of our lives. We, going along with the world, have become indifferent about sitting next to him in His own house – the place where He feeds you. The world doesn’t care anymore, why should you. The Shepherd is not popular to sit next to – or to sit in His house, why should you even be here. You have it all under control, right?

Here’s one more situation I would like to place you in. The ratty, smelly, bloody and not so accepted Good Shepherd walks before you as you are standing and talking to a few good friends. You see Him and so do your friends. The Good Shepherd comes to say, “Hello” and desires to know how you are doing right now. Do you stop and talk to Him? Do you share your complaints, your cares, your concerns and your requests to the Good Shepherd? Do you talk with Him the way He would love to hear from you? And also, do you introduce Him to your friends? Do you call Him who He is, the Good Shepherd of all that is and ever will be? Do you make sure that your friends know Him and get to know Him better? What do you do? Do you shun Him and act like you don’t know Him? Or, is the stinky, smelly, “not so” popular Shepherd your Shepherd?

Look how He comes to you. He doesn’t take the highest seat. No, rather, He brings Himself right to your side. He is dirty, smelly, and not so popular because He looks like a mess. He takes all of your sins upon Himself. So excuse Him if He looks like a mess. He is supposed to. He does it out of love. And though we may not want to look like, or smell like a shepherd, there is nothing that Jesus our Good Shepherd would like more than to be with you.

Jesus says, *“I am the Good Shepherd. I know my own and my own know me.”* You belong to Jesus. You know Him, and He knows you. I promise He knows you – even when He seems so distant – He knows you and He knows exactly how to shepherd His sheep. He knows you and He loves you – to death. And when the Good Shepherd approaches you, He makes no bones about knowing and loving you. I don’t care who you are or what you have said or what you have done. He knows you, and you are His very own. He speaks to you as one who loves you. He does this through His precious Word. That’s how we know how very much He loves us. Amen. The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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