

Pastor T.C. Arnold
3rd Sunday of Easter
John 10:11-16
April 18th, 2010

I would like to set up for you a particular situation. Imagine you are in a nice restaurant enjoying a wonderful dinner with your family or spouse. The food is great and the atmosphere is fantastic. But then a homeless man comes into the restaurant off the street. The hostess and the manager look at him and they are immediately concerned and a bit perturbed. Most everyone in the restaurant, including you, sees the man make his way up to the counter asking for his name to be placed on the list for the next available table. You hope it won't be next to you. The hostess cringes. What will the patrons think? What will my manager think? Will he have enough money to pay for the meal? Besides, his clothes are all tattered and his personal hygiene is horrible. He smells like he hasn't taken a bath in months – because he hasn't taken a bath in months. He has carried all his personal belongings into the restaurant with him in a sack over his shoulder like Santa. This man is not treated like the others. He is a man, like all the other men and women at the nice restaurant, but he is not accepted. There is something about him that we don't like. We want him away from us, back on the street, and preferably, not begging money from me.

Back in the time of Jesus, and yet in some parts of the world even today, people feel the very same way about certain men who tend flocks. Even though shepherds had a steady job – people would not consider them as acceptable members of society. The reason – like the homeless man who came into the nice restaurant, he looked un-kept, his clothes were less than spectacular (to say the least) and he smelled like he had taken up company with sheep for last several weeks. Most of society didn't want the shepherd around. Rather, they wanted them out in the field where they belong.

You see, shepherds were rare breeds. They didn't come upon their vocation by chance – rather, they were born into the task. He was sent out with the flock as soon as he was old enough to go. He grew into his calling to be a shepherd. The sheep became his friends and companions; and it became second nature to him to think of them before he thought of himself. The shepherd would not waver from the sheep when a robber or a ravenous wolf came to claim one of his sheep to be his own. He would stand his ground and even die protecting the sheep. And that, beloved in the Lord, is the reason why we hear our Savior use a shepherd to illustrate who He is.

When Jesus walked the earth 2000 years ago, was He accepted by the “well off” men and women of high society – or at least those who frequent nice restaurants? Was Jesus born into His task? Was Jesus friends and companions with those He led? Was Jesus, the Good Shepherd, ready and willing to lay down His life for the sheep – would He stand His ground and die protecting the sheep?

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 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 according to Jesus. 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 could 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. It is the same thing with shopping and spending too much, or texting and facebooking 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 used 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?

Well today, a family in our midst is putting their most prized possession into the arms of a stinky, smelly shepherd. They did it at that font right over there. They are saying to God that this prized gift of a small child belongs to you. Bless this child in the water of Baptism. Give this child life in this water, Good shepherd of our Life. And that is exactly what He has done. With bloody hands as a result of our sin, Jesus washes clean Macee Lynn today.

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?

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.