

SCRIPTURE TEXT: John 10:11-18

SERMON TITLE: The Good Shepherd

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

What powerful images these are from Psalm 23: When God is my shepherd I lack for nothing—I lie down in green pastures—I'm led beside still waters—my soul is restored—I journey down paths of righteousness—I fear no evil as I walk through the valley of the shadow of death—I take comfort in the one who protects my life.

I long for a life like this. It's the life I look for in God; it's the life I seek in Jesus Christ; it's the abundant life that Jesus came to give. In fact, as we heard a moment ago, Jesus said, ***I am the good shepherd***. Do you remember what God said to Moses when Moses asked for God's name? God said: ***I am who I am***. Well, Jesus identifies himself completely with this God of the Torah story. He knows the Father and the Father knows him. He receives the Father's command and he does it.

I am the GOOD shepherd—or the model shepherd—or the true shepherd. He cares for each individual sheep; each one knows his voice and responds to it. But he also tends the flock—all of the sheep. He keeps them together. He knows his flock and his flock knows him.

He even has other sheep that don't yet belong to his fold—other sheep who are scattered and lost, or who have not yet learned to recognize the shepherd's voice. But the good shepherd's task is to gather all the sheep into one flock under the care one shepherd—which means that the abundant life provided under the good shepherd's care is for everyone.

But there are dangers lurking about. There are wolves on the prowl—ready to scatter the flock and devour the life that the good shepherd provides. So I ask you: Do we have any wolves

in our lives? What wild beasts threaten to diminish or devour our lives and this flock that we call the church? I can name a few: economic anxiety, self-absorption, status-seeking, addictions of one kind or another, bigotry, hatred, lust, revenge, indifference.

And then there are hired hands whose job it is to protect the flock—whose voices urge us to follow—who promise life—but then only provide fear and an increased threat to life. These hired hands run away at the first sign of danger—thinking more of self-preservation than protecting the flock. They care more for themselves than for the sheep entrusted to their care.

Now frankly, when I hear Jesus speak of these hired hands, I first look to myself, because in my inner depths, there are unreliable voices of fear and insecurity that say “follow me,” but that then lead me away from life—voices that promise self-protection and fulfillment—but that ultimately leave me vulnerable to the wolves. These voices deafen me to good shepherd’s call that promises life—and life abundantly.

Do you hear the voices of these hired hands calling? These voices say: “Be afraid when life gets hard. Run away when the pressures are too great. Don’t give a thought to anyone else, but only to yourself. Protect yourself even if it means throwing other people to the wolves.”

This is not the kind of life I long for; this is not the kind of life I seek. To live like this is death and I want life. I yearn for the care of a good shepherd—a good shepherd who lays down his life for the flock.

Do any of us here this morning know what’s it’s like to have someone die so that we might live? During my time on the staff of the Admiral Nimitz Museum in Fredericksburg, I saw with my own eyes, men still living and breathing because a buddy some 60 plus years ago, hurled himself on top a live grenade to absorb the blast and save his friends.

Well, this is what the good shepherd does—he lays down his life for his flock so that they

might live, but he then he takes his life up again—and this is within his power to do because the very power of life itself comes from the Father through him. So in following the good shepherd, we find life that the world can't give and the world can't take away. In his flock, we are protected from the hired hands and the wolves that would rob us of life. And even if we wander away, he always calls us back. He even comes looking for us to bring us back into the flock.

Now let me share with you an example of what the good shepherd can do—and I turn once again to the book, *The Hiding Place*, which tells the story of the Ten Boom family and the ordeals they endured at the hands of the Nazis during World War II—all because they dared to hide Jews from their oppressors.

As Corrie and her sister Betsie entered the Ravensbruck concentration camp for the first time, they could see the skull and crossbones posted at intervals on the walls to warn of electrified wiring along the top. They saw acres of soot-gray barracks stretched ahead of them. Corrie said that Ravensbruck appeared far grimmer than their previous camp. She wrote, “Here, every vista ended in the same concrete barrier; the camp was set down in a vast manmade valley rising on every side to those towering wire-topped walls.”

During their first night at Ravensbruck, as they prepared to sleep on a blanket in the open and on the ground, Betsie began singing these words, “The night is dark and I am far from home . . . “Lead Thou me on.”

And the good shepherd did lead them into ways of life even in that death camp. And the good shepherd protected them from the wolves. During one particular work detail, Corrie watched a brutal female guard strike her sister across the chest and neck with a riding crop—and in that moment, she nearly lost her way. Without knowing what she was doing, Corrie seized a shovel and rushed at the guard. Betsie stepped in front of her before anyone had seen what was

happening. “Corrie!” she pleaded, “Corrie, keep working!” Betsie grabbed the shovel from Corrie’s hand and dug it into the ground.

Corrie noticed that a red blood stain and a welt had appeared on Betsie’s neck from the beating. Betsie noticed where Corrie was looking. Betsie laid her hand over the whip mark and she said to her sister, “Don’t look at it, Corrie. Look at Jesus only.”¹

This is the kind of life I long for and the kind of life I seek. How about you? Jesus said, *I am the good shepherd, I know my own and my own know me.*

¹ Ten Boom, Corrie with Sherrill, John and Elizabeth. The Hiding Place. Old Tappan, NJ: Spire Books, 1971, 189-190, 204-205.