

The Good Shepherd

John 10:1-10

Jesus said, "The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep." Jesus made this statement against the background of himself being the shepherd. Jesus also asserted that he is the good shepherd. By examining the behavior of the shepherds before him and the ones whom the people were already familiar with, we can understand why Jesus made reference to "good". Jesus is faithful, caring, self-giving and saving. In contrast, the Shepherds of the Old Testament fed on the sheep instead of feeding the sheep. The religious leaders around Jesus were not leading the sheep like a flock. They were leading the sheep into religious enslavement and neglect.

Jesus, the good Shepherd is the one who calls each sheep by name and they obey him. Jesus also has the ability to lead his sheep and they follow in faith. In the agrarian society in which Jesus lived, it was the regular practice of the shepherds to lie in front of the sheep pen to protect their sheep and lambs. Drawing reference from this practice, Jesus said that he is the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. He demonstrated that when he died for his sheep.

Sheep is a figure of obedience. Should any sheep stray; Jesus does not chastise that sheep as being disobedient. Instead, He goes in search of that one lost sheep, tenderly lifts it up and brings back that sheep to the fold. This signifies rejoicing over the salvation of a soul once lost.

As the good shepherd, Jesus is the epitome of salvation from anything that can separate us from God. Psalm 23 summarizes beautifully the way in which the good shepherd cares for his sheep which as we notice, is salvation from anything that will harm the sheep. We shall not be in want. This refers to total satisfaction (didn't he assure the woman at the well that she would never be thirsty again?) One reason is Jesus not only leads us beside still waters; he restores our souls and fills us up with living water.

Should we get tired and hungry; he leads us into green pastures where we get some needed rest. Should we feel the urge to stray; he guides us along right pathways having revived our souls.

There are patients in hospitals now just craving for comfort, but due to the nature of the present disease (COVID-19) they face illness and even death without their loved ones near them. However, we should be comforted by Jesus' presence who walks with the sheep through the valley of the shadow of death, so much that the sheep feels comforted by Jesus' rod and staff. With His rod and staff to guide us, His sheep, we fear no evil.

May we always be satisfied members of Jesus' fold. May we guard the unity of the flock, keeping in mind Jesus' prayer "that there may be one shepherd and one flock." Focus on the words of our collect for today; "May we know him who calls each of us by name and follow where he leads".