

22 April 2018  
4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter  
ILC, Wichita, KS.  
John 10: 1-10; "The Shepherd's Gifts"

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. (293 words)

The text which forms the basis for my message this morning is taken from the Gospel lesson for today. I would like to reread especially verses 14 to 16 from John, chapter 10:

**<sup>4</sup> "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—<sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.**

Here ends the text.

My good friends in Christ.

Today is one of my favorite Sundays in the Christian Church Calendar year. It is a favorite because today is Good Shepherd Sunday. There are many beautiful symbols for "Christ the Good Shepherd" such as the fantastic stained glass window on the north side of the church.

When I think of "Christ the Good Shepherd Sunday"... I always smile... for I have had a couple of incidents with sheep... that always make me smile.

When I was serving the Lutheran parish in Newton... one of our members raised a lot of sheep. And they had a huge farm. The Youth and I used to go out to their farm to ride horses, camp out, and fish in their pond.

One such adventure so us going to the pastures where they kept their herd of sheep. Youth... they get me into more interesting situations. Since I did not grow up in the country... and are not very comfortable around farm animals... the Youth knew they had me set up for a comic adventure... before we started.

The Youth had convinced me that I needed to walk over to the pasture where the sheep were grazing because there was a fantastic view from a little hill. As I walked through the pasture... the sheep started walking towards me. Not feeling comfortable... I began to walk quicker through the pasture... and the sheep started a slow jaunt my direction.

That is all the prompting I need to break out into a full run... with the sheep running after me... until I got to the pasture fence... and lept over the fence... leaving the sheep in a stand still on the other side.

Needless to say... the Youth were roaring in laughter at the image I gave them.

Shepherds and sheep... that is our Gospel for today.

As we reflect on the Good Shepherd there are two parts of a shepherd's life I would invite you to join with me as we reflect upon:

- 1) The role of a shepherd;
- 2) The gifts of a shepherd

I. The role of a shepherd was pretty simple, but yet, it is difficult enough that not just anyone could be a shepherd.

A. The first job of a shepherd was to be a provider/protector.

- The shepherd had to protect his sheep.
- He carried a sling and was pretty skillful in using it.
- Often he would use it to drop a stone in front of the nose of a wolf who might get too close to the sheep.
- He had his staff, a long crooked stick... which he used to keep the sheep together when they might start to wander away.
- The shepherd made sure that the sheep had plenty of food and water.
- He would lead them to green pastures where the grazing land was rich and there was plenty of water.

B. The shepherd also knew his sheep.

- The herd was never too large.
- In many instances he even gave names to the sheep.
- The shepherd knew his sheep because they spent a lot of time together.
- In the days of Christ, it was pretty common for a shepherd to spend as much as eight or nine years with the same sheep.

C. Our Lord Jesus fits the role of the Good Shepherd perfectly because He..

- offers us protection during our earthly life...
- He provides for all our needs...
- and He knows us personally.

The image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, as we read it in the beautiful wording of John's Gospel... is a bold way of showing us what Jesus does..... in human experience.

II. Christ is our Good Shepherd in that He fits perfectly the Role of the Good Shepherd. Not only does our Lord fit the role of the Good Shepherd... but He also offers us gifts as our Good Shepherd.

Two of the main gifts that our Shepherd offers us are:

...

- a sense of identity
- a sense of security.

A. One of the enormous problems facing many people in our culture today is a ...

1. lack of identity.

- It must be a terrible feeling to think that one doesn't matter...
- that nobody really cares much what happens to you.
- The real tragedy in the life of a person who feels that nobody cares... is that after a while ... they will begin to believe it... and then they will reach out to any group... just for a sense of belonging.
- This is tragically why so many people become involved with cults... or gangs.

2. Our true sense of identity comes from our Lord, Jesus Christ... our Good Shepherd.

- Christ issues the call to all people in the world to follow Him... to become His sheep.
- Christ calls us to be His children.
- His love for us is so great that He willingly offered His life on the Cross to free us from our sins.
  - The Cross is our identity.
  - The Cross tells us that we belong.
  - The Cross daily reminds us that ... we are loved.

B. The second gift that we receive from our Good Shepherd... is the gift of security.

If we were to ask people a simple question, such as:

“What do you believe to be one of most important concern's of people today?”

many people would answer,

“security.”

1. There are many areas in which people desire security.

It could be:

- financial
- medical
- relationship security
- physical security.

There are so many areas of our lives that need a sense of security.

This is precisely where human need and Christianity come together.

One of the real gifts of the shepherd was security.

2. Jesus as the shepherd gives security to His sheep, so our Good Shepherd protects us.

The world can.... And it will... throw all types of problems our way.

But .. when we let the words of the Good Shepherd in our lives and when we make the Words of Christ a part of our lives... then nothing can destroy our security.

Our security comes from the Words of St. Paul who writes, **“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** (Romans 8: 38,39)

That my friends, is real security.

Conclusion: On this Good Shepherd Sunday, what thoughts come to your mind as you think of a job description of your Good Shepherd?

A beautiful way to visualize this...is by looking at the stained glass window on the north side of the church .

As you look at this window... see the image of Christ the Good Shepherd.

- do you see a shepherd who loves you?
- A shepherd who protects you?
- A shepherd who heals you when hurt, and picks you up when you fall down?

When you look at this window... or when you think about the Good Shepherd ... do you accept the gifts He has come to bring???

The gift of identity and security.

On this Good Shepherd Sunday... remember these thoughts for a later time when you might need to hear these words again.

Jesus says: <sup>4</sup>“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—<sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.” Amen.

Now may the peace of God which surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.