



THE TENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

August 12, 2012

“THE GOOD SHEPHERD”

Sermon text: John 10:11-15

"I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep."

Dear members of The Good Shepherd's flock,
What is a good shepherd?

1. The good shepherd gives his life for the flock.
2. The good shepherd watches over and feeds his flock.
3. The good shepherd knows his sheep and they know Him.

In our sermon text Jesus calls himself "The Good Shepherd". The first thing He states about the good shepherd is that the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. This Jesus did out of love for us through his suffering torture and death on the cross to redeem, or buy us back, from the spiritual death and everlasting fires of Hell which we all deserve because of our sins. Only Jesus Christ, the God-man, could accomplish this redemption for us.

As we are told in Romans 3:23: *"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."*

And in John 14:6: *"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."*

Now, while it is true that Jesus ultimately stands alone as "The Good Shepherd", all pastors who are true to their calling are to pattern themselves and their work after the example of Christ, Our Good Shepherd.

It is for this purpose in our text that Jesus contrasts himself with the hirelings. The hirelings of our time are the same as the hirelings of Jesus' day. These are the false teachers, the Pharisees who are not truly interested in taking care of the souls entrusted to them, but really only interested in improving their own financial status and being in a position within the church to exercise authority over their congregations.

These are men who, as long as it serves their needs – as long as they and their pocket books are safe from the attacks from the unbelieving World – are willing to simply ACT as though they are true shepherds, when in reality they are not.

A man who is a good shepherd, a pastor who is true to his calling, will give his life for his flock, for his congregation. This may well involve personal and financial hardship.

It may mean that he will have to suffer the reproach and evil personal attacks from those outside of his own congregation, or it may involve some other sacrifice, great or small, all of which he willingly suffers for the spiritual welfare of his flock.

Our text tells us that a man who does not really care about the spiritual welfare of the congregation which the Holy Spirit has called him to serve, but rather cares more about the personal and financial benefits made available to him through his congregation-- that man is *not* a true shepherd and is no better than the hired man, who doesn't own the sheep.

This is not a pastor being true to his call.

The good shepherd also watches over his sheep. This involves staying alert to what is going on in the world around his flock. This is done so that the good shepherd, the pastor who will be true to his call, will be better able to warn and defend the congregation from what we might call the "ravenous wolves" of this world.

These "wolves" include the decline of morality as evidenced in much of the nation's television programs and popular music of our time, as well as perhaps some unionistic social event that may take place within our own community. And there are many other subtle attacks on Christian values and the Christian home. These attacks may come from friends and even our own relatives. But no matter where the attack may come from, no matter how fierce the wolf, or how high the personal cost, the good shepherd is ever watchful of these things and will bring them to the attention of his congregation so that it might be strengthened by God's Word against such onslaughts.

The flock may also be attacked by wolves in sheep's clothing. Such are those who call themselves Christians and yet knowingly teach and/or practice false doctrine. Among these lying, murderous wolves are they that reject that clear Word of God that tells us we receive the forgiveness of sins and washing of regeneration in Baptism, those that teach we do not receive the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation in the Lord's Supper, or those who teach and practice any other perversion of the Truth of God's Word.

The hired man, our text tells us, sees the wolf coming, and runs away as fast as he can, or as is often the case in our day, simply does nothing at all. Thus leaving the sheep to be scattered, torn apart and murdered, because he doesn't really care for the sheep.

The good shepherd, the pastor who is true to his call, on the other hand, sincerely cares for each and every member of his congregation, and is watchful as well; but then, unlike the hireling who runs away at the first sign of an attack, the good shepherd puts on the Whole Armor of Christ, takes up the Sword of God's Word, and rushes forward to meet the wolf's attack head-on, in order to righteously defend his flock.

Furthermore, the good shepherd is concerned not only with the well-being of his flock, as a whole, but he is also concerned with the spiritual needs, the spiritual feeding, of *each individual* in the flock as well.

But how is the pastor, as a good shepherd, to supply the needs of the individual in his flock? Is he to seek to apply the wisdom of this world's psychology, sociology and human reasoning to troubled souls?

The answer to these questions is found in Second Timothy chapter 3, verse 16:

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

Truly caring for the individual members of his flock means that the pastor will use *both* the rod and staff – the Law and Gospel – of God's Word as Scripture itself directs. The pastor who will truly be a good shepherd will diligently instruct and guide the members of his congregation in the right path of Christian life. This includes properly using God's Law to admonish and instruct where this is needed and again abundantly applying the healing balm of the Gospel to comfort and encourage individual members, who are troubled by their sins and repentant of them. And this is to be done, not just during scheduled worship services, but also at all times and in all places, and especially when the spiritual life and faith of individual members appear to be in danger of estrangement from the Lord because of unrepentant sin.

Yes, the good shepherd, the pastor who is true to his call, will reprove, admonish, instruct, and correct using God's Word as the *only* means to accomplish this, for nothing else is truly effective. Nothing else, but God's Holy Word can produce the needed results. And that to bring the erring member to a knowledge of his sin and how dire his need for the Savior by bringing to bear the full brunt force of the Law, thereby driving the sinner to his spiritual knees in godly sorrow over his sin. And then, when there is repentance, the good shepherd is to freely announce the Gospel, the wonderful spiritually healing Grace of God in the death and Glorious Resurrection of Christ Jesus, to him.

Furthermore, the good shepherd will not allow personal feelings or personal relationships to dissuade him from doing this most important work which the Holy Spirit has called him to do. Neither will he allow financial gain or the threat of loss prevent him from the Lord's Work. To do otherwise would be to become as the Pharisees of our text--nothing more than a worthless hireling.

Our text next tells us that Jesus, The Good Shepherd, knows us and we know Him.

How well does Jesus, our Good Shepherd, know us? Our text tells us that He knows us the same way as He and Our Heavenly Father know each other!

We can therefore, with all joy and confidence, exclaim with David,

"O Lord, Thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compasses my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it all together. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it." (Psalm 139:1-6)

Here we can see that even though we, with our woefully frail human understanding, cannot possibly understand how God can know each and everyone of us so intimately and personally, we can be sure that He does indeed know us, and cares deeply for *every one* of us.

The man who would be a good shepherd here on earth, the pastor who will be true to his call, also has the responsibility of getting to know the individual members of his congregation, so that he might better serve them by supplying for their individual spiritual needs. The pastor should find time to visit his congregates and not only when they are sick or need. But also he should otherwise work to develop a God-pleasing personal relationship with them, so that he might be better equipped to serve them as a good shepherd and in doing so emulate and give glory and praise to God.

Our text also tells us that we know our Good Shepherd, Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. How do we know him? We come to know him only from God's Word, the Bible. Yes, we come to truly know Jesus from reading and hearing the Scriptures. We can know what wondrous things God has done for us through Christ Jesus and so be strengthened in faith by reading the Bible during personal study and family devotions in our home, by attending church services and Bible study or Sunday school.

We can know how and why He became our Good Shepherd. How that out of perfect love and mercy for us sinful human beings, He humbled himself, took upon himself our human nature, our temptations and our afflictions and as the god-man Christ Jesus redeemed us from sin and eternal death. We can know how this He accomplished *once and for all mankind* by living a sinless life, fulfilling the Law of God perfectly in our place and ultimately sacrificing himself by the shedding of his holy innocent blood on the cross of Calvary. We can know from the Bible that in all this He completely washed away our sins and that as a result of all He has done for us, God no longer sees our sins. No more are we clothed in the filthy rags of sin and spiritual death. No, Dear Friends, but we are told *by grace alone through faith alone* in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:8.9), we are perfectly clothed in His pure righteous-ness and innocence, fit to stand before the judgment seat of God and lay rightful claim that we are indeed Children of God and heirs of heaven with Christ.

Oh, My dear Friends, what a glorious day that shall be – Yes?

Till that great hour is come, then in humble gratitude let us as God's dear children sincerely desire and work to live a holy life in service to our most gracious God and our fellow man here on earth. For this is our reasonable service; secure in the knowledge that when our Heavenly Father calls us home we shall by God's grace through faith worked in our hearts by His Holy Spirit go to be with our Good Shepherd forevermore in paradise!

Oh, what sweet joy this comfort of His precious Gospel gives to all that believe!

And now may the God of Peace, that brought again from the dead Jesus Christ, our most Good Shepherd, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.