

May 8, 2022 – Good Shepherd, Beaver Dam

Easter 4 -- Good Shepherd Sunday & Mother's Day

Grace, Mercy, and peace be yours in abundance from God, our Father and Jesus Christ, our Savior, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

John 10:22-30 -- ²² Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³ and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon's Colonnade. ²⁴ The Jews who were there gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." ²⁵ Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one."

Dear fellow sheep of the Good Shepherd!

Do you remember the first time you stood by the deep water and were being encouraged to jump in? Maybe at the swimming pool and your swim instructor assured you that she would hold on to you. You knew that even though her head was above the water line your legs were too short to allow you to stand and breath. Or maybe it was at the cottage and the water depth at the end of the pier was deeper than your height, but a parent or sibling was assuring you that they would keep you from drowning.

That scene in my life (the swimming pool version) comes to mind as I listen to Jesus in our text. I hear him saying that as the Good Shepherd he will keep me safe through all the troubling depths of life in this sinful world. Today as we celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday we are assured:

Blessed Are the Sheep of Jesus

- They listen.
- They are known.
- They follow.
- They are safe.

Our opening verses sets the scene: **Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon's Colonnade. (vs. 22-23)** . Earlier in this chapter Jesus had made the comforting declaration that **"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." (v. 11)**. Now some time later he was back in Jerusalem in the winter time, sheltering from the winter wind on one of the temple porches. The Feast of Dedication falls in mid-December. You might have heard of it called Hanukkah. You can search the Old Testament for the origin and purpose of this festival, but your search will be in vain. This festival began less than two centuries before the days of Jesus. When the remnant had returned from Babylonian Captivity they has rebuilt the temple. But several invasions had caused more damage and desecration. Around 165 B.C. Judas Maccabees led a revolt to drive out the occupiers. This allowed for a rededication of the temple, but only a small amount of consecrated oil was available for burning the dedication candles, but the story says that too small amount of oil kept the candles going for eight days until more oil could consecrated. Thus Hanukkah became the Festival of lights and is still celebrated joyously in Jewish homes today.

On this occasion Jesus was challenged by his detractors: **"How long will keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly" (vs. 24)**. With his answer Jesus scolds them, **"I did tell you, but you don't believe. The**

miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep." (v. 25, 26) His continuing words are the source of our assurance that as his sheep we are truly and richly blessed. "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. (vs. 26-27)

The unbelieving Jews refused to listen to the words or works of Jesus. Those proved that he is the Christ. Jesus assures us that his sheep are blessed because they listen to him. You listened to Jesus when you were brought to the baptismal font and through water and the Word the Holy Spirit assured you that you are part of his family and that he has a place for you in the eternal glories of heaven. You continue to listen to him as you read and hear and use the Holy Scriptures.

But we also must recognize that our listening to him has not been perfect. Our frequent frustration and dissatisfaction with various circumstances in our daily lives shows that we sometimes forget the Good Shepherd's assurance of blessedness. When we honestly evaluate the quality of our listening to the Good Shepherd, we recognize how desperately we need the care and protection of the Good Shepherd. In love for us he laid down his life for us so that he can now assure us "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand (v. 28). As you continue hearing the Word; gathering with fellow believers; receiving Lord's Supper; and reading Scripture our Good Shepherd assures you that you as one of Jesus' sheep are richly blessed.

The Good Shepherd further assures us of our blessedness with his statement: "I know them." This assurance both comforts and terrifies me. He knows me better than anyone else. I can hide some of my sins from you and from those who are close to me, but not from the Good Shepherd. He knows the sins that I harbor in my heart and mind. He sees when my eyes wander. He knows how covetous I can be. He knows how desperately I need to be rescued from sin and death. He has known that since before creation. Because he has known our inextricable situation, He and Father formed their amazing rescue plan. Now he knows us as his sheep. This truth sustains us, especially when the events of our daily lives seem so challenging. Keep Jesus' assurance in your daily thoughts: He knows you; your joys and troubles; your hopes and fears.

Further Jesus assures us that we, his sheep, are blessed because we can follow him. Though Word and Sacrament the Holy Spirit strengthens us for life in this world. The devil, the world around us, and even our very own sinful natures try to convince us that following Jesus robs us of much of the best which life in this world offers. The Good Shepherd wants us to understand that just as the sheep who follow their shepherd to green pastures and refreshing water are blessed, so we his sheep are richly blessed when we follow him to the nourishing spiritual food of Word and Sacrament and so receive the refreshing waters of spiritual life.

Could there be a better example of following the Good Shepherd than that of the Christian mother? You are one God's gifts and one God's blessed ways to keep us safe in his arms. Women are naturally equipped with the gift of nurture. Mothers know their children intimately. Mothers carry their unborn infant from conception. Mothers hold them close to their hearts. Mothers give their children confidence as growth allows them to spread their wings. Mothers watch with loving concern as first steps are taking and as the years go by and children become fiercely independent. Mothers rejoice to see successes and are always their when knees are scratched and hearts are broken.

So, today we honor Christian mothers as we see them carrying out their role for following the Good Shepherd. Children, you can follow the Good Shepherd by honoring your mother not just one day a year with a card and a restaurant meal. Follow the Good Shepherd by making every day Mother's Day. Keep reviewing the Ten Commandments. They show you how to keep on following the Good Shepherd. As you listen to the Scriptures the Holy Spirit will strengthen you as you follow the Good Shepherd.

So we have seen that as sheep of the Good Shepherd we are blessed because we listen to him, because we are known by him, and because we are enabled to follow him. And this is still more. Jesus says: **“No one can snatch them out of my hand.” (vs. 28)**. As sheep of the Good Shepherd we are safe. Troubles can surround us in daily lives. Finances can fail. Good health can disappear. Loved ones die. Extreme weather rages. Wars and rumors of wars continue to swell. Nothing can snatch us out of the powerful, protective arms of the Good Shepherd. What comfort and confidence this gives us as we endure each new challenge. Feel those arms around you! Walk boldly through life knowing that he is ready to carry you when you feel that you can't take another step.

In fact, he keep us so safe and secure that he promises each of us a wonderful place in eternal life. What joy that will be, when he gives us that never perishing spot in eternal life! What a powerful reason this gives us to listen to and follow the Good Shepherd!

Frequently life seems more terrifying than a youth standing at the edge of the deep water! But the Good Shepherd assures us that the waters life won't overwhelm us. We, his sheep, are blessed in being Jesus' sheep, because we listen to him, because he know us, because we can follow him, and because he assures us of safety. Be assured, you are blessed sheep of the Good Shepherd. Amen.

Pastor Joel W. Jaeger