

John 10:1-10 May 6, 2017

The 23rd psalm and the Good Shephard. Hope you are ready for a 4 or 5 hour sermon. No, I guess not! But there is so much material in these passages and I know I can only talk about some of them.

Has anyone here ever been a shepherd or had to take care of animals? I have taken care of animals mostly doing paper work although I would occasionally have steer duty. And I was always afraid that they would get out when it was my turn. After all, how does one lone lady corral 4 500 pound steers?

Steer duty, hog duty or sheep duty has its worry. A sheep shepherd was the life line of the sheep. Unmanaged they wander from here to there and become food for wolves, coyotes and bears and succumb to intestinal flukes and other parasites. Sheep love their shepherd. They know his voice. They know his face. They trust him with their very life. He is the manager-the boss-the master in their lives who makes the difference in the sheep's destiny.

The strange thing about sheep is that because of their very makeup it is almost impossible for them to be made to lie down unless 4 requirements are met. #1 they need to be free of fear #2 they need to be free from friction with others of their kind #3 they must be free of flies and parasites #4 they must be free from hunger. Less aggressive sheep are often far more contended, quiet and restful so there are definite advantages of being "a bottom sheep". Sheep would rather have the affection of the shepherd than occupy a prominence in the flock.

It is not generally recognized that many of the great sheep countries of the world are dry, semi-arid areas. Most breeds of sheep thrive best in this terrain. Less bugs. But green pastures did not happen by chance. All that was needed to feed the sheep included clearing the land, planting grass and irrigation which represented tremendous toil and skill and time for a careful shepherd. Keep in mind that hungry sheep are ever on their feet, on the move, searching for another scanty mouthful of forage to try and satisfy its gnawing hunger. These sheep are not contented, they do not thrive, and they are no use to themselves or to their owners.

Now let us look to ourselves as followers of a shepherd. It is your shepherd's desire to see our best interests served. His management is something few Christians ever fully enjoy. Too often, because of our own perverseness we often prefer to feed on the barren ground of the world around us. Water. Water. Water. Water determines the vitality, strength and vigor of the sheep and so it is with us. In precisely the same manner Christ made it clear those thirsty souls of men and women can only be fulfilled, quenched by drawing on himself. In Matthew 5:6 Jesus said "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled and satisfied".

The difficulty in all of this is that men and women who are thirsty for Spiritual capacity for God and divine life are desiccated or dried out and in their dilemma they will drink from any dirty pool to try and satisfy their thirst for fulfillment. Have you ever met a happy spoiled adult or a

happy egotist or a happy person filled with anger? Somehow they don't want to be led in a path of rightness. Very often they are unsure of where to look or really don't know what they are looking for. They actually prefer turning to their own ways even though it may take them straight into trouble. Broken homes, broken hearts, derelict lives and twisted personalities remind us every time men and women who have chosen their own way without a good shepherd.

Jesus never made light of the cost involved in following him. IN FACT He made it painfully clear that it was a rugged life of rigid self-denial. It was not the natural way a person would ordinarily live and this is what made the price so prohibitive to many people. There is a tremendous emancipation from self in this attitude. One is free from shackles of personal pride when the desire for self-assertion and self-pleasing gives way to the desire to simply pleasing God. Then much of the frets and strains are drained away from daily living. The saints from earliest times have repeatedly pointed out that becoming a true follower, a dedicated disciple, lies in the will.

When a man or woman allows the will to be crossed out, and connecting the great I AM in their decisions, then indeed the cross has been applied to that life. This is the meaning of taking up ones' cross daily.

Now you have heard a lot about sheep and about following Jesus. So we kind of know the attributes we need in a shepherd. Someone who is knowledgeable of the terrain, someone who will lead to life giving water, someone who sincerely cares, someone who protects, someone who encourages. Hope Lutheran is now in the process of discernment

as we prepare to call a new pastor. It's been more than 6 months since we started on this venture. Fortunately we have enjoyed an interim pastor who has the attributes of a good shepherd-even a record of accomplishment.

We are about to form that call committee. Please keep Hope Lutheran in your prayers that our discernment and Jesus' will will lead us to our new shepherd.