



1616 W. Mequon Road, Mequon WI 53092
(262)241-3121 www.stjohnsmequon.org
Email: office@stjohnsmequon.org
Pastor James Tiefel
(262) 853-9723 (cell#)
Email: pastortiefel@gmail.com

Building Blocks Christian Learning Center
bbclc@stjohnsmequon.org

The Fourth Sunday of Easter

April 25, 2021

Jesus is the Good Shepherd

Although the shepherd is almost unknown in our nation and sheep almost unseen, at least where we live, the image of the Good Shepherd remains precious to believers. On the fourth Sunday of Easter every year, Jesus' words in the tenth chapter of the Gospel of St. John hold our focus, and Christian art and music carry that focus to our hearts.

First Reading

Acts 13:15, 16a, 26-39

Listen to the scriptures and receive the blessings Jesus won for his sheep.

Second Reading

Revelation 7:9-17

The Lamb at the center of the throne will be our shepherd.

Gospel

John 10:22-30

The Good Shepherd's sheep listen to his voice and follow him to eternal life.

Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon's Colonnade. 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."

Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. 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. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one."

Introduction - I think I've seen an actual shepherd once in my life. I was riding in a car on a two-lane road out in the country—I have no recollection where—and all of the sudden up ahead were a bunch of sheep in the middle of the road. We stopped and watched. I'd seen sheep in pens before or in fields—although you don't see sheep all that often in Wisconsin—but I had never seen sheep in the middle the road! And then all at once there was this guy, maybe in his 40s, kind of scraggy, trying to lead those sheep across the road. We all laughed because none of us had ever seen an actual shepherd before.

Except in church, of course. In church we see shepherds all the time or at least we hear about them. Sometimes as a group, like the shepherds in the fields at Bethlehem, but more often alone. Singular, not plural. The Lord is my shepherd in Psalm 23. In Luke 15 the parable about the shepherd who left the 99 safe sheep and went looking for the lost sheep. And then in John chapter 10, Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd.

Everybody in Bible times knew about shepherds. Not so much for us. But the metaphor of Jesus as the shepherd and his people as the sheep has become very precious to us. "I Am Jesus' Little Lamb" is one of the first songs children learn to

sing. Aging Christians often request Psalm 23 for their funerals. I'm pretty sure all of us can think of a picture of Jesus with a shepherd's crook in one hand and a little lamb in the other. And that little lamb is me or you.

And so every year, on the fourth Sunday of Easter, we hear Jesus explain what he does for us as our Good Shepherd. The Gospel for this Sunday is always from the tenth chapter of St. John's Gospel. Today the Gospel is the last of the three sections in John 10, verses 22 to 30. So those are the words we're going to focus on this morning. And this little outline sums them up.

I Am Jesus Little Lamb

I listen to his voice

I follow his lead

1. It was fall and Jesus was six months away from the cross. The Jewish leaders had had it up to here with him and they were looking for ways to kill him. Jesus decided to avoid Jerusalem. He would decide when he was going to die, not the Jews. But then, all once, there he was at the Festival of Tabernacles and he started teaching in the temple. The confrontation started immediately and John tells that story in chapters 7, 8, and 9 in his Gospel. The words that we find so precious, the words Jesus spoke about being the Good Shepherd, were actually a response to his enemies. What Jesus said infuriated them. **He's demon-possessed and raving mad.** Jesus took off for Galilee. His time had not yet come.

Two months later he was back in Jerusalem for Hanukkah and that's where today's Gospel begins. The Pharisees found him in the temple and the confrontation started up where it had left off. **The Jews who were there gathered around him**—they cornered him and tried to bully him; they wanted an answer they could use to condemn him. **How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.**

We can sense the impatience in Jesus' voice: **I did tell you, but you do not believe.** He sure did tell them and he told them again and again. He called God his Father, he called himself the Bread of life, the Light of the world, and Living Water. On top of that he performed miracle after miracle to back up his claims: **The works I do in my Father's name testify about me, but you do not believe.**

Here's the big question: Why would they not believe? These religious leaders knew the Old Testament almost by heart. Why did they refuse to see Jesus as the Messiah God promised to send? Other people believed. Why not them? Jesus let them know the reason: **You do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice.** Those Jews refused to believe because they refused to listen. And they refused to listen because Jesus wasn't the Messiah they wanted. They didn't give a rip about a Savior from sin. All they cared about was the emperor in Rome. Their Messiah needed to get rid of the tyranny of Rome and restore the prestige of Israel. They had an absolute blind spot: Unless Jesus became the Messiah they wanted, they would not see, they would not hear, they would not listen, and they would not believe.

I am Jesus little lamb and so are you. We sing it and we say it and we believe it because we do listen to Jesus' voice. At a certain point in our lives, we were just as clueless and conceited as those Jews, of course. Birth sin does that. But the Holy Spirit called us by the gospel, most of us when we were baptized and some of us later in life. Ever since we've been listening to Jesus. Not always. Not perfectly. We listen to the devil sometimes and sometimes we listen to the sinful nature that still lives in us. But we recognize Jesus' voice, we repent of our sins and we put our sins behind us. We listen to Jesus' voice when he says, Your sins are forgiven.

The Jewish leaders heard Jesus but they didn't listen. They approached him on their own terms and with their own definitions. They decided what they wanted Jesus to be, and when he wasn't what they wanted him to be, they refused to listen. We need to take care. If Jesus is nothing more to us than a boss who issues orders or a bank that makes us rich or a doctor who can cure us or a picture we put on a wall or a name we speak at church, the chances are good that we're hearing Jesus and not listening to him. **My sheep listen to my voice,** Jesus says. We always want to be like the babies Jesus held in his arms and said, **The kingdom of God belongs to such as these.** We want to listen to Peter's

encouragement, **Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.** So we perk up when Jesus speaks, like a baby looks up when it hears mom's voice. We listen to Jesus with wide eyes like a little boy who adores his daddy. We pay close attention like a patient who trusts her doctor, or like an athlete who respects his coach. **My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.** And so we say, I am Jesus little lamb; I listen to his voice.

2. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. Jesus' disciples must have shivered a little when they heard those words. They were following Jesus and he had warned them about what was coming. They didn't always buy into those suffering and death predictions, but they knew something ahead wasn't going to be good. And it wasn't. Only John saw Jesus die, the rest ran. What they missed was the turning point of human history: the Son of God took on the sins of the world—our sins, too. He endured the punishment those sins deserved—what we deserved, too. And when the work was finished, Jesus issued a guarantee that changed our lives forever: **I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand.**

Following Jesus takes us to the cross; no doubt about that. But following Jesus also takes us to the empty tomb. And at the empty tomb we find a relationship with Jesus that never ends. When we follow Jesus, there is no condemnation for sin, no need for guilt, no cause for fear, no doubt in prayer, no worry for the future, no threats from the devil, no dread of death, no question about heaven. In heaven this Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world will be at the center of the throne room of God, and he **will be our shepherd. And God will wipe away every tear from our eyes.** The Son of God and his Father, the Lamb and the Lord work together for our good. Jesus said, **My Father, who has given [the sheep] to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one.** I am Jesus little lamb. I follow where he leads, and where he leads me and where he leads you is to life with God now and then eternal life in God's throne room.

Listen to the Good Shepherd. Follow the Good Shepherd. And then you will sing with simple, happy faith:

I am Jesus' little lamb.
Ever glad at heart I am,
For my shepherd gently guides me,
Knows my needs and well provides me,
Loves me ev'ry day the same,
Even calls me by my name.