April 30, 2023 POWERFUL WITNESS

As Christians, in Christ we are a community of faith, a special place where we can minister and be ministered too. We need each other. Therefore, as Christians the community of faith needs to be a priority in our lives. John uses many images in his Gospel, but my favorite one is that of Jesus as a shepherd. Like a shepherd, Jesus is concerned with the welfare and the care of His sheep.

The shepherd loves his sheep. Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd. He didn’t call himself King Jesus. He called himself I am the light, I am the way, the truth and life, I am the living water, I am the shepherd. The term “I am the shepherd” really stands out in my mind. We are his people and the sheep of his pasture. We depend on God for everything and just as a shepherd watches over his sheep, so does God watch over his children.

Two caretakers are mentioned in the gospel account for this Sunday St. John 10:1-10, the Good Shepherd, and the hired hand. The hired hand had no connection with the sheep, no relationship with the sheep. He thought of himself first and the sheep last. If a sheep was attacked by a wolf, or lost, oh well the hired person was not worried about it.

When we look at the good shepherd. The good shepherd is the owner of the sheep. He has a special relationship with them. Most owners didn’t own a lot of sheep. A flock of 100 was huge. Most flocks were no larger than 10-20. Sheep were like valued pets. There was nothing about their sheep that the good shepherd did not know. The individual sheep in a flock all look alike to the untrained eye. For a good shepherd, however, can tell them apart--often because of their markings or peculiar traits.

You see, a shepherd, in order to know his sheep and care for them, must live among them. He must be close to them. Jesus came from heaven to earth to be close to His sheep. The Good Shepherd became a sheep, took on our nature, and lived life just like us (except without sin). That’s why He is the good Shepherd.  Jesus, the Good Shepherd, knows the peculiar traits of His flock and watches over us with love and concern.

The 1st phrase in our closing Hymn today goes like this “Savior, like a shepherd, leads us,”. Shepherds go before their flock; they lead their flock, never asking them to do anything that they wouldn’t do first. “…and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.” Even though flocks may mingle together, each flock knew its own shepherd’s voice, and each would follow its own shepherd and no other.

Jesus said "My sheep know my voice; in the hymn we continue to sing, “Much we need thy tender care; In thy pleasant pastures feed us, for our use thy folds prepare.” John in his gospel writes in this chapter 10, that Jesus, describes a sheep pen. It had only one door. When the sheep returned to the fold at night after a day of grazing in the pleasant pastures, the shepherd stood in the doorway and inspected each one with tender care as it entered.

If a sheep was scratched or wounded by thorns, the shepherd would anoint it with oil to facilitate healing. If they were thirsty, he gave them water. After all, had been counted and brought into the pen, the shepherd would lay across the doorway so no intruder could enter. The shepherd thus became the door. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who protects and sustains the life of the sheep.

As we get to know Jesus better, we understand that he is not driving us forward with sheepdogs or sticks, but he is leading us. Jesus tells us to put God first, and the gospels record him rising early in the morning to pray to his Father. Jesus tells us to love our neighbor, and the gospels record him loving and forgiving and healing all those around him. Jesus tells us, “You will be persecuted,” and the gospels record his persecution all the way to a cross. Jesus leads us by example of his “Powerful Witness”. If you would like to know more about Jesus being your Shepherd, please join us in our worship on Sunday at 11:00 AM.

Peace!

Rev. Dr. Christopher Ponnuraj

Minister

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