

John 10:22-30 & Psalm 23 - "The LORD Is My Shepherd"

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According to the three year lectionary that we are currently using, this Fourth Sunday of Easter is also known as Good Shepherd Sunday. I've included in the service some of the Good Shepherd hymns from our hymnal, such as our last hymn, which is based on the most well known hymn of the OT, Psalm 23 (one of my favorites). Therefore, to keep me from talking all morning about this psalm, don't be distracted if I keep referring to my notes. They help me, and will hopefully help you, to stay focused on the central theme of today's sermon and the opening words of Psalm 23, "*The LORD is my shepherd.*"

To help us meditate on the incredible, everlasting joy and peace that these words give to us, "*The LORD is my shepherd,*" let's consider first the word "*LORD.*" While our last hymn doesn't show this, the word LORD in most of our English Bibles is in all capital letters, which is our English way of referring to the OT personal/proper name of God, (יהוה Yhwh). In the Hebrew language it may have been pronounced something like Yahweh.

But especially relevant for this Good Shepherd Sunday is the conversation that the LORD had with Moses when He sent Moses to deliver the Israelites from their enemies in Egypt. When Moses said to the LORD, "*If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?'*" God said to Moses, "*I am who I am.*" And he said, "*Say this to the people of Israel: I am has sent me to you.*"

"*I am*" (היה) in the Hebrew language is a play on words since it's similar to God's personal/proper name, "*Yhwh*" (יהוה). Therefore, when Jesus, just before the text of our Gospel reading (and at the beginning and end of our Introit for today) said: "***I AM*** the good shepherd," He said it in a way that identified Himself as God.

This was not the first time Jesus used these words to identify Himself as God, and the Jews knew that. Back in chapter 8 of John's Gospel, Jesus said to the Jewish leaders: "*Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.*" So they picked up stones to throw at him." They wanted to stone Jesus for blasphemy, because they knew He was referring to Himself as God, and the Christ. That's why, when the Jews said to Jesus, "*If you are the Christ, tell us plainly,*" Jesus answered them, "*I told you, and you do not believe.*"

Jesus follows up this identification of His divine nature by saying that He is "*good.*" Jesus was not boasting when He said this, He was simply stating the truth. Remember when the rich young man called Jesus, "***good teacher***"? Jesus responded by saying: "*Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone*" (Mark 10:18). And now Jesus calls Himself "*good,*" identifying Himself again as God.

Then Jesus refers to Himself as the "*shepherd.*" This brings to mind David, the most well known shepherd of the OT, but also David's words in Psalm 23, "*The LORD/ Yhwh is my shepherd.*" Almighty God is our "*shepherd*"—our "*good shepherd*" who takes care of us, His sheep, both physically and spiritually, body and soul.

What incredible, everlasting joy and peace these words give to us! *The LORD is my shepherd.*" For, the Good Shepherd leads us not only to "*quite waters*" to satisfy our physical need for water, He also leads us to the waters of Holy Baptism to "*restore our souls*"—to deliver us from our sins and from this "*valley of the shadow of death.*" Therefore we need "*fear no evil,*" for our Good Shepherd is "*with [us].*"

And when we by our sins, or other people by their sins, seek to separate us from our Good Shepherd, His “*goodness and mercy pursues us all the days of our lives*” to restore us again and again to the flock/Church so that we may “ *dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*”

What incredible, everlasting joy and peace these words give to us! *The LORD is my shepherd.*” The long awaited Savior has arrived and is with us, and “[*the works that He does in His Father’s name bear witness about Him*” —that He is, indeed, our Almighty, Good Shepherd. Just before our text, Jesus gave physical sight to a man born blind, and then He pursued this man later to give him the more important spiritual sight of faith. This man’s faith was obvious when he “*worshipped*” Jesus (Jn 9:38), like we’re doing this morning.

These wonderful, good things were happening even before Jesus’ greatest work that bears witness about His identity as God our Savior, His death and resurrection to “*remove*” all sin from us. It’s this ultimate Good News that John may be referring to by mentioning that the events of our text took place during “*the Feast of Dedication*” (also known as Hanukkah).

One of the OT readings during “*the Feast of Dedication*” is from Zechariah 2 & 3. In this reading the LORD/Yhwh speaks of Himself as the Christ when, for example, He says, “*Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for behold, I come and I will dwell in your midst, declares the LORD/Yhwh. And many nations shall join themselves to the LORD/Yhwh in that day, and shall be my people. And I will dwell in your midst, and you shall know that the LORD/Yhwh of hosts has sent me to you.*”

Notice that the one who comes to “*dwell in your midst,*” refers to Himself as the “*LORD/Yhwh,*” yet He also says that “*the LORD/Yhwh of hosts has sent me to you.*” This was fulfilled when God the Father sent to us God His Son in the flesh and blood of Jesus—the promised Christ.

And in Zechariah 3, “*the LORD of hosts*” says that the one whom He will send to dwell in our midst will “*remove the iniquity of this land in a single day.*” Those who followed Jesus would see this take place when the Good Shepherd, who is also the Lamb of God, takes away the sin of the world on “*a single day,*” Good Friday. Through this Good News, our Good Shepherd gives us “*eternal life,*” that we may “*never perish.*”

During the dark days of your life when the increasing troubles of this world seek to rob you of your joy as a child of God, think about these things, through which the “*LORD*” lifts you up and gives you an incredible, everlasting peace and joy that passes all understand. For, by the grace of God, we can say, “*The LORD is my shepherd.*”

All glory be to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

[Children’s Sermon] This Sunday is not only Good Shepherd Sunday, it’s also Mothers’ Day. And through both our mothers and especially our Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, God lets us know that He loves us.

One of the ways God lets us know that He loves us through our mothers is when our mothers, once they knew that we were growing inside of them and were, therefore, going to eventually cause them a lot of pain and suffering, willingly went through the pain and suffering of childbirth so that we could be here today.

But the greatest way God lets us know how much He loves us is when the Son of God willingly became a man in Jesus Christ so that He could suffer and die on a cross to remove our sins, and make it possible for us, through His Word and Baptism, to be born again and live forever with Him in paradise.

One of the ways we can thank God for His love is by thanking people like our mothers. To help you do that this morning I have a red carnation for you to give to your mother. The red reminds us of the blood that our mothers and especially Jesus Christ was will to shed to give us life.