

Preaching for Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd Pastor Scott Trevithick

Date: April 25, 2021 Year B Good Shepherd Sunday

Text: John 10:11-18

Title: What's in a Name?

Focus: What does Jesus' self-designation as good shepherd mean? (For one, that he is willing to "lay down his life" for his sheep.) What does that mean for the church which calls itself "Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd"

Gospel Reading John 10:11-18

¹¹[Jesus said,] "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. ¹⁴I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father."

Today is "Good Shepherd Sunday" in the Church/Liturgical Calendar

Good Shepherd Sunday is not our own designation—it's not recognizing a congregational anniversary, for instance. The name comes from the scripture readings assigned to this day, the 4th Sunday of Easter, by the Lectionary. Psalm 23 is used all 3 years of the Lectionary cycle and then the gospel is John 10: Year A is vv. 1-10, Year B vv. 11-18, and Year C, vv. 22-30. This year, we're in Year B and have just read vv. 11-18.

Rich, vivid imagery of the readings. David's Psalm—the 23rd Psalm

- Shepherd himself: "There is a completeness in the simplicity of the affirmation of faith in the opening line, isn't there? "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want (or: I have everything I need.)"
- Green pastures, still waters (a calm pastoral setting—one we'd all like to experience)
- Paths of righteousness—places where we'd like to go.
- Valley of the shadow of death—danger is around us.
- Shepherd's rod and staff—symbols of guidance (from our own tendencies to go astray) and protection—from danger that lurks around us.
 - The table and the house of the Lord--places where we may belong forever.

What do you notice as we focus on the gospel reading from John?

One of the things you've heard me say is to pay attention to **repetition**. What word, phrase, or idea is repeated and how does that signal what's important? Sometimes that repetition is immediately apparent just by reading through the passage and it just sticks out—you already notice it. Reading this passage from John this week, what did you see and hear? What did you notice?

There are multiples repetitions in the text:

Who is this story about? We have obvious repetitions with the name of the primary characters.

- 3 times good shepherd
- 3 times hired hand
- 2 times wolf

This story is about them. Most of all, it's a story about the Good Shepherd and about Jesus who says plainly, "I am the good shepherd."

- Shepherd—image of protection, safety, belonging

Jesus differentiates the good shepherd from the hired hand: when danger comes, the hired hand doesn't put himself at risk, but runs away.

Jesus also describes the wolf, which represents danger and risk. The wolf is the one who scatters and divides.

The next repetition to point out is what the good shepherd does. What makes the good shepherd "good?" I of course noticed this repetition: the good shepherd **lays down his life for the sheep**, but it's still striking how many times that phrase is repeated in the passage. It's 5 times in these 8 verses.

The richness of these metaphors is worthy of our lingering with them for a while and pondering them. . .

- Jesus the good shepherd. One of the things that the repetition asserts is that Jesus willingly laid down his life for humankind. It's not forced upon him. Jesus says, "I lay it down of my own accord." (v. 18).

One unanswerable question--but worth pondering--is "Why?" Why is Jesus as the good shepherd willing to lay down his life for the sheep? I don't know that there's an answer—at least not directly in that text. But sitting with it or pondering it leads us to acknowledge the act of grace and love, recognize it and give thanks for it.

The image of a sheep is not very flattering to humankind, but it's worth reflecting on, too, for the ways that the metaphor fits.

- *In worship, we viewed a brief video clip of a sheep which is stuck in the ditch. A shepherd/helper tugs on its leg to free it. The sheep bounds off, but instead of running off to open pasture, it tries to leap over the ditch and instead gets stuck again.*

This clip opens with the sheep so deeply wedged in this crevice you can't initially tell what it is or what's happening. The next thing that struck me is how hard this person, in the role of shepherd caring for the sheep, has to pull on the sheep's leg. You watch this video, and you get a sense of how hard the animal is stuck and you wonder how it's going to turn out. Then you cheer "Yay! it's free!" You see the animal bound off and, in that brief moment of time before the scene itself plays out, you imagine how the scene is going to end—you picture the gratefully-freed sheep happily bounding off to join the others in a verdant pasture—the kind of imagery that's in the 23rd Psalm.

"Uggh!" You see the animal leap across the ditch—only to land directly in the ditch again.

Is that image one to linger with a while, too, pondering the ways that we stubbornly cling to our own way and find ourselves caught in the same trap.

And then what would be the next scene in that story? What happens next? I picture Jesus the good shepherd coming after us again. There is a comforting word in these shepherd texts that is not explicitly said: Nowhere does it say that the sheep are well behaved or wise or worthy of the shepherd's sacrifice. There are reminders—whether they are from this video clip, or in Scripture, or reflection on own observations and experience, that those in the flock are prone to wander, greedy, ungrateful, and slow to learn from their mistakes. The good shepherd lays his life down for them anyway. No equivocations. No qualifiers. The shepherd binds up wounds, whether they are inflicted by the wolf, or flock-mate, circumstances, or one's own stubbornness and foolishness.

"What's in a Name?" The name of Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd

We've talked about Jesus calling himself the "good shepherd" or saying, "I am the good shepherd;" let's talk about our name, the Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd.

It's a story I've told before, but it's one that needs to be repeatedly told. It's an identity-shaping story. It's a family story, reminding us of who we are and to whom we belong.

Stories that form and shape your identity are ones that need to be told and re-told, such as when family and friends gather at one's death and retell old stories. Other stories that deserve retelling are stories of one's baptism. A couple weeks ago, Stephanie, our Director of Faith Formation, and I were talking with students in confirmation—they are 7th and 8th graders. We asked them to talk with their families about **the story of their own baptisms**. Who was there? Where was it? Was it at Good Shepherd? Who was gathered around? Those are stories that should be repeatedly told as they root us in who we are and to whom we belong.

In the same way that we tell family stories to connect us to those to whom we belong and root us to our core identity, a Good Shepherd Church family story I think we need to keep telling is how we got our own name.

History of the name “Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd”

May 7, 2019: As told by Larry Struve, whose mother Rachel was a charter member and who was a young boy at the time of the church’s founding.

Pastor Scott:

The question of the origin of the name of "Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd" has been asked at various times in the past--at the 50th anniversary celebration in 1997 and those occasions where people have tried to write a history of this congregation. Unfortunately, there is no clear answer, and I've gotten the impression over the years that people in the early days did not give much thought to the name. When the charter members of LCGS gathered in 1947 to begin this church, founding pastor Jim Oslund asked them what they wanted to be called. He got a lot of blank stares, and so they asked him for examples of some names. There was already a Missouri Synod Church in town, St. Luke's, so they didn't want a fancy name like that, implying there were a lot of saintly people in the founding group. Many of the charter members had come from somewhere else--i.e., the Midwest, California, and from other church denominations, including Catholics where in town for a divorce. Some didn't even consider themselves Christians, having studied Buddhism and other religious traditions. As best I can understand, Jim Oslund and a few leading members then suggested that with such a motley crew comprising the initial congregation the name "Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd" sounded good, because **it brought to mind the image of a merciful Jesus Christ who was in search of lost souls, many of whom comprised that early group.** I have never heard that any other name was considered.

And it began the tradition of Good Shepherd being an inclusive, welcoming congregation, open to everyone who walked through its doors. That has been my memory from the very beginning. I wish it were a more interesting story than that, but I don't think you'll find another explanation for how the name got started. It was an idea that popped into the heads of the charter members, and they thought it sounded good.

Peace. Larry

When Larry and I were talking this week about this story, he told me some more of his memories:

- It started as a group of “misfits,” he said. They started to care for one another & Pr. Oslund bound them together.
- “Unique characters,” he said, from the pastor to the choir director.

- “Their care for one another was genuine and authentic.” He spoke of shared meals and frequent gatherings that created an extended family feel.
- Larry was a kid in those early years of the church and that set a model for him of what church should be.

The essential character is passed on. . .

Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd was founded in 1947. That’s a long time ago—approaching 75 years. Carolyn and Paul Chimits became active in the mid-1950s. Larry’s mother was a charter member, and he was a boy who remembered some of these key events and stories. Esthermae Haines, who died in January of this year, was another one who was present in the early days of Good Shepherd.

That was so long ago, and many people, leaders, and pastors have come and gone. And yet there’s something in the DNA of the congregation, something that’s been passed down that continues to be an enduring characteristic of this congregation. That we are in some ways still a bunch of misfits. We are still those who are bound together by grace rather than any earned status. We still need to recognize that it is God’s Spirit who has brought or who brings us together. Recognition of that grace will help us to see that there is nothing we deserve, but that, received by grace, we seek to welcome others in the same way.

We give thanks to God for Jesus the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep.

And let us reflect on the grace which we have inherited with that name which calls us to reach out to other stuck and lost people and live into the character of that name of Good Shepherd.