

## Reflection for Easter IV Year B

Sunday, April 21st, 2024

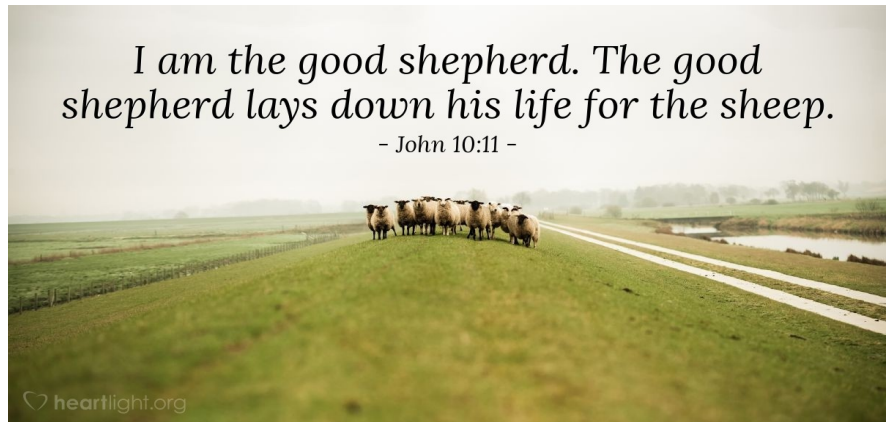
### ***Good Shepherd Sunday***

Acts 4:5-12; Psalm 23; 1 John 3:16-24; John 10:11-18

In his book, *God is More than Enough*, Pastor Tony Evans shares this story:

On a trip in the African rain forest, a man was following a guide. As they pushed onward into deeper and darker jungle, the guide, using his machete, constantly whacked away at the thick green growth that rose like a wall everywhere before them.

"How do you know where to go?" the man asked. "Where's the path?" The guide replied, "I am the path."



This morning we reaffirm who is our rightful path, the Good Shepherd. On this fourth Sunday after Easter we always turn to a portion of Chapter 10 in John's Gospel and our beloved twenty-third Psalm. Both speak to God's love and care for us.

Our gospel reading tells us that there are many types of shepherd ~ the hireling who runs away at a sight of trouble (v 12), other shepherds who lose their sheep that Jesus finds on his way and adds to his flock (v 16); and the constant, unwavering and trustworthy shepherd who will make you lie down in green pastures, leads you beside still waters and will restore your soul. (Psalm 23)

Jesus also says that His love extends to all people, where he reminds us in verse 16, "I 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."

We identify ourselves as a church family; that is comforting but it is also limited, exclusive. Perhaps it is time to change the beginning of Christ Church's current Mission Statement from "We are a congregation" to "We are a community committed to the establishment of a place and presence in which to worship God, proclaim his kingdom, and make known the love of God in Christ Jesus through the guidance of the Holy Spirit." On its Facebook page we are described as, "A loving community of Christians living God's Word in today's world."

With our tri-point parish and expanded regional ministry, it enables us to further spread the message of Good News, further expand outreach and support, both directly and indirectly. Perhaps it's time to bring back "Back to Church" Sunday and invite a neighbour, a friend, more community outreach.

On the other hand, American Episcopal priest Barbara Brown Taylor proffers this idea: "If churches saw their mission in the same way, there is no telling what might happen. What if people were invited to come tell what they already know of God instead of to learn what they are supposed to believe?"

What if they were blessed for what they are doing in the world instead of chastened for not doing more at church?

What if church felt more like a way station than a destination?

What if the church's job were to move people out the door instead of trying to keep them in, by convincing them that God needed them more in the world than in the church?"

All this requires not only fresh thinking, but introspection, too.

Are we, the sheep, following Jesus?

According to author Max Lucado, in his book, *Travelling Light*, "we humans want to do things our way...Forget the common way. Forget the best way. Forget God's way. We want to do things our way! And according to the prophet, Isaiah, that is exactly our problem. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way."

Max Lucado continues, "You wouldn't think sheep would be obstinate. Of all God's animals, the sheep is the least able to take care of himself. When David said in Psalm 23, "The Lord is my Shepherd," couldn't he have come up with a better metaphor than a shepherd for sheep? When David...searched for an illustration of God he remembered his days as a shepherd. He remembered how...he watched over them. And David rejoiced to say, "The Lord is my Shepherd." And in doing so he proudly declared, "I am his sheep!"

Sheep are stubborn animals, but they are actually smart. Unlike cattle which are herded and prodded from behind, sheep are led from the front.

"...to herd sheep, you walk in front of them, and they follow. Sheep will not go anywhere unless someone else goes first – and that's the shepherd's job. Sheep also know their shepherd's voice."

Rev. Brown Taylor also tells us that "at the end of the day, several flocks of sheep would gather at the same watering hole for a drink before the walk home. The flocks would intermingle as they drank, but the shepherds didn't worry about losing one of their own. When the time came, the shepherd would make a distinctive sound – a cluck of the tongue, a two-note whistle – and his sheep would instantly recognize that peculiar sound as their shepherd's voice. They would pull away from the watering hole and follow their shepherd home."

The Lord is my shepherd.

Like many of you, Psalm 23 is a personal favourite, having memorized the King James version as a child. What does the shepherd do? Rev. Michael Marsh explains, "The shepherd leads and guides. The shepherd revives. The shepherd protects. The shepherd companions. The shepherd nourishes and feeds. The shepherd sets a table of welcome and hospitality in the difficult places of life."

When I recite these familiar verses, Psalm 23 speaks to my heart. But it also occurs to me that I have something in common with sheep ~ we can both get lost without hardly trying, we can be led astray, turning to our own way.



This reminds me of a true story about a Merino sheep in New Zealand named Shrek. He had wandered away from his flock and his shepherd and he was lost for six years! He lived in nearby caves, eating what he could find and avoiding the shearer's blade. When Shrek was finally found in 2004, his wool weighed sixty pounds, roughly six times the average fleece produced by a Merino sheep. The weight on his back was threatening his life, he had trouble walking, and his breathing was laboured. Shrek shot to fame immediately. He was sheared live on New Zealand's national television, and his fleece was auctioned off to raise money for children's medical charities ~ a happy ending for all. The lesson here: Shrek needed his shepherd and so do we. We need someone to guide and protect us.

No matter how often we read or hear the familiar twenty-third Psalm, it seems to come with a fresh message of God's care for us.

Have you experienced a lost time in your life? A lost job? A lost relationship? A lost friendship? A lost child? Were you ready to give up, but, somehow, your life became renewed? You began again. You all know I have.

I've shared my immediate wake-up call in a middle-of-the-night dream ~ the sense that something was with me, someone upon whom I could depend.

That dream transformed my life.

That I could reclaim ME, that I was worthy.

My soul was restored; I was led down right paths; and He continues to comfort me.

Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep" (vv 12-14).

No matter what you're facing today, Jesus knows you, and He will not leave your side.

I can say with complete confidence, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want!"  
Amen.



Shrek in 2004 (1994-2011) with owner John Perriam