



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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April 13, 2008
4th Sunday of Easter
1 Peter 2:19-25
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Acts 6:1-9; 7:2a, 51-60
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 23
Second Lesson: 1 Peter 2:19-25
Gospel: John 10:1-10

Imitate Your Good Shepherd

When you are a teenager, how do you view your parents? Do you think they are not really that bright, they don't really understand things, and they don't really know what they are talking about? Probably sometime along the line that thought crosses your mind when you are a teenager. Then later, as you grow up, and if the Lord blesses you with family and children, there comes that moment, that flash of insight in time when your child does something that irritates you and you say something to them and all of a sudden it dawns on you, "I sound just like mom" or "I sound just like dad," and it kind of freezes you in your tracks because you think you are never going to do those kinds of things when you are a teenager and you know everything. But you find out later on in life that maybe your parents knew a little bit more than you thought and maybe they knew some of the things they were talking about, so you find yourself repeating them because you learned over the course of time just how true they were. Imitating our parents can be a good thing if we imitate the good characteristics they have for us.

This morning our God comes to us and he tells us to follow in someone else's steps, to imitate our Shepherd—the Shepherd and overseer of our souls, to follow in his steps because he has left us an example that we are to imitate. But he also reminds us of some things that we just can't imitate about our Good Shepherd, and then he directs us to the "what" and the "why" of why we want to imitate the Shepherd and overseer of our souls.

How many of you here this morning drive a car? How many of you can replace the engine in your car? Some of you should have your hands up unless you are that embarrassed because some of you can. I can't. I can't do it. I don't care how long I would sit and watch one of you do it, it isn't going to happen. I don't want it to happen. I don't really want to do those things and right now I couldn't if they said, "Watch me now. Go and do likewise." It's just not going to happen.

There are just some things that are not going to happen when it comes to imitating our Good Shepherd. We are reminded of some of those this morning, aren't we? We are told that he suffered for us. I'll grant you, you and I are going to suffer in this world. We live in a sinful world. There will be suffering and we maybe will suffer for someone else in taking on something for them so that they are helped, but we can never suffer for them in the same way that Jesus suffered for us. His suffering was a part of him bearing our sins. His suffering was to take away our sins. You and I can suffer for one another, but you and I cannot carry each other's sins. We can't bear each other's sins on the cross. No man can redeem the life of another. "The cost is too much" the psalmist tells

us. You and I can't do that. Also as a part of his bearing our sins, we are told that he committed no sin nor was any deceit found in his mouth. When you were a child growing up, your mom didn't wash out your mouth with soap because there was no deceit found in your mouth. It was because you sinned, right?

You and I have sinned even if we never got our mouths washed out with soap. You and I have sinned in many, many different ways, and you and I will continue to sin in many, many different ways. You and I want to serve God, but we aren't going to do it perfectly. We cannot imitate Christ by committing no sins. It's just not going to happen.

His suffering for us, his committing no sins in our place, his bearing the penalty of our sins in his body on the cross, that was part of his being the Good Shepherd and the overseer of our souls. That was how he made us his own sheep because ever since Adam and Eve had fallen into sin, people are born not one with God. They are born separated from God. So Jesus came and he redeemed us. He bought us back from sin, death and the devil by his perfect life, by his innocent suffering and death. That's what makes him the Good Shepherd.

You and I can't grow up to become the Good Shepherd. We can be shepherds of other souls, but we can never be the Good Shepherd. Sheep don't grow up to become a shepherd. So you and I can never be the Shepherd and the overseer of our souls because we can't do this. We are reliant; we are dependent upon our God. And as we heard this morning in the song from the choir, that's a wonderful thing because he will be there constantly. He will be there faithfully. We saw Stephen put his trust in the Shepherd and the overseer of his soul—that all comes not because we follow in our Good Shepherd's footsteps, but because he walked in our place.

But now the ability to imitate him in other areas of our life, God puts in front of us this morning. He tells us through Peter, "You were called to suffer for the sake of Jesus because you are conscious of God. You were called to this because Christ suffered for you leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps. When they hurled their insults at him, he didn't retaliate. When he suffered, he made no threats." This is the area where we are called to imitate Christ. He speaks specifically of suffering, not just because we are sinners and we do things that are going to get us into trouble and things are going to cause us to suffer. He is saying that's not commendable before God to you. He's talking about the kind of suffering that comes because we are Christians.

When Peter was writing, he was writing to a group of people that were spread all over Asia Minor and in the context of these verses, he is talking to people that were slaves. He says, "When you are beaten for doing wrong, you probably earned it." But he says, "If you are beaten because you are conscious of God"; if you are beaten for doing what is right before God, it's commendable to do what is right before God and to suffer hardship because of it. Jesus himself said, "Blessed are you when people persecute you because of me. Great is your reward in heaven." He tells us to keep our eyes focused on him and endure unjust suffering for the sake of God because we are living for him.

Think of what a temptation that would have been. First of all, there are the obvious ones he mentions. When you suffer, to threaten back; when you are insulted, to retaliate; you and I can relate to that. You and I are probably pretty good at that in our own way. We probably all develop some kind of defense mechanism that we lash back at those in some way, shape or form when they attack us or when we are ridiculed or we feel like we are being mocked. Children do it very directly. Adults maybe do it a little more circumspect, but we still do it.

Here we are called not to do that. We are called to endure suffering because we are Christians rather than lash back or rather than fall away from God. Think of how it would have been for those servants that Peter is writing to. They had been worshipping false gods and sure, they might have gotten in trouble, but they knew they deserved it. Now they are getting into trouble just because they were worshipping the true God. The temptation to avoid the beating by going back to a false god would have been great.

You and I face the ridicule of friends, people looking at us as though we are some religious nut or some “Jesus lover and heaven forbid that other people might think that that’s what we are” might be what we think to ourselves at times. So we cave in, not at the threat of a beating and being treated like a misbehaving animal like these people were, but we don’t want people to think we are “un-cool” or something like that, so at times we cave in to their pressure.

It’s clear what God is telling us. This is what we should do—suffer, bear up under the suffering, don’t retaliate and you are commended before God. That’s the “what,” but the “how?” Where does the wherewithal come from to do that because you know that’s not your natural instinct. Your natural instinct isn’t to get an insult and say “thank you, can I have another?” Your natural instinct is to lash back with every kind of thing you have in your arsenal of words that hurt.

Peter tells us doesn’t he? “You were called to suffer this way so that you follow in his steps.” The way we get through this is by following in Jesus’ steps. How do you and I follow in Jesus’ steps? How do you and I grow in our life of faith, in living the life of faith and enduring these hardships? How do we follow in his steps? That’s what Peter is pointing us to as the key. If this is a fruit of faith, enduring unjust suffering is a fruit of faith, the only way faith is going to produce more fruit is if it gets nourishment. The drought comes and the apple tree in your back yard stops bearing apples, do you get mad at the tree or do you acknowledge that there is a drought and that’s why it’s not producing fruit? Or do you go out with a yardstick and whip the tree and say “Produce more fruit. I’m going to beat you into doing more.”

Do we ever do that? Do we ever try to take the Law, the yardstick of the Law, and try to beat each other into doing what is right just by using the Law instead of pointing people back to following in the steps of Jesus? Going to his Word, seeing his love, seeing what he suffered for us, seeing the times that we have retaliated and how he loved us enough to die for them, seeing the times that we got upset and we got angry and we got even, seeing then that they are sin in his Law, but seeing his Gospel and how his love took them all away.

We want to produce the fruits of faith. We follow in his steps, not by sitting at his feet and listening to him talk but by sitting at the feet of his Word and hearing his voice. By hearing his voice say to us, "This is my body. This is my blood." By hearing him say to us, "The Spirit was poured out into our hearts through the water and the Word," and reflecting on the meaning of our baptism in our daily lives.

The more that you and I do that, the more that we will imitate our Good Shepherd. That's God's promise. And he is faithful.