



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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May 22, 2011
5th Sunday of Easter
Sermon Text: [John 10:11-18](#)
Pastor Maurice Hoppe

First Lesson: [Acts 17:1-12](#)
Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 33](#)
Second Lesson: [1 Peter 2:4-10](#)
Gospel Lesson: [John 14:1-12](#)

Our Good Shepherd Watches Over Us

Safety is one of those things that is really uppermost in many people's minds these days. A great deal of time and money is spent in accomplishing that. Security has developed into big business. We have bank vaults and safety deposit boxes to keep our money and other valuables in. Safes in private homes have become rather commonplace. I don't think you hear very much these days about people hiding their valuables under a mattress as you might have in the past.

Aside from their valuables, people try desperately to keep their lives safe and secure. We try to do this by building strong and sturdy houses to protect ourselves from the elements. Many spend a great deal of money on security systems. Our president is surrounded by Secret Service and body guards. Last month we observed a tornado awareness week and as we well know from the terrible storms that hit in our state and down south, it probably was a good idea. We need to know where the safest place is to be in a storm. A lot of time is also spent in teaching fire safety in our homes and in our schools.

But no matter how much time, no matter how much effort we put into things to make ourselves safe and secure, there still are times when that system breaks down. Banks get robbed. Homes are broken into. The president is attacked. And storms wreak havoc in a matter of seconds. I'm sure that Osama bin Laden felt secure where he was too, but to his surprise, it wasn't secure at all.

Amid that kind of insecurity, the Lord Jesus has something to say to us today that we should not only find interesting but especially very comforting. That is that our Good Shepherd, Jesus, watches over us.

When Jesus spoke the words of our text, it was about six months before his suffering and death. So it would have been in the late fall of the last year of his public ministry. Jesus begins this section of Scripture with a statement that immediately gets our attention. He says, "*I am the good shepherd.*" As he makes that statement, all eyes had to be riveted on him. So from the very outset, we are invited to look at Jesus and only Jesus and away from ourselves, our limitations, our worries and our problems.

Once Jesus has our attention, he makes us see him for what he really is. He really and truly is our shepherd, the good one. Jesus is in a class all by himself. There's no other shepherd that even comes close. Perhaps that word "good" is rather bland. Jesus is

not good in the sense that a piece of cake is good or that a student who receives 94% on a test is doing good work. It might be better said that Jesus is excellent. He is the very best with respect to both his personal character and the work that he does. Jesus is after all the only one good enough to merit this high mark of praise from the Father who demands absolute perfection. We know that the Father was well satisfied with his Son. Both at his Baptism and at his Transfiguration he said, *"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."* (See [Matthew 3:17](#) and [Matthew 17:5](#).)

Part of what makes Jesus the Good Shepherd is his selfless sacrificing love for the sheep. Here again Jesus relies on a simple picture to bring across that point so vividly. He says, *"The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."* Maybe that picture isn't quite as graphic to us as it would have been to the people to whom Jesus first spoke those words. In our part of the country, large flocks of sheep are not all that prevalent. In fact, I can only recall a few sheep farms in all the years that I've lived in this particular area. At any rate, people today generally are not all that familiar with the work of a shepherd. However, the people to whom Jesus spoke at this time were very familiar with that type of work and with the importance of that ancient profession.

Sheep have a reputation of being docile, harmless and rather stupid animals. In storms they've been known to pile up in the corner of their pasture actually smothering one another to death. They also have been known to wander off and, even if this is only a short distance, to be totally unable to find their way back. We all know that a sheep does not have fangs or claws to defend itself from hungry predators. In short, sheep are helpless without a shepherd.

That's where a dedicated loving shepherd comes in. Such a shepherd will care for his sheep. He will see that they are provided for with pasture and with water. A number of passages in Scripture speak to us of the work of a shepherd. In that familiar [23rd Psalm](#) we are assured of the Lord's care when David writes, "The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul."

A shepherd would also stand between his flock and danger. David also showed that kind of care. He told Saul, *"Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it."* ([1 Samuel 17:34, 35](#).)

A good shepherd might even make the supreme sacrifice for the sheep, that of risking and even laying down his life for the sheep. Such is the case with our Good Shepherd, Jesus. He is willing not only to provide for us and care for us, he was willing to give up his very life for us. That's the kind of love he demonstrated to us and for us, a love that went the distance in accomplishing our salvation.

In our text, Jesus contrasts the Good Shepherd with the hired hand. He says, *"The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf*

coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.” The words “hired hand” show us that this individual is watching over the sheep only because of the pay. He doesn’t have an investment in those sheep, nor does he invest any love or affection in them. He doesn’t care. We could almost hear this fellow complaining about the lousy hours, the poor pay and the smelly working conditions. It’s understandable that with that kind of attitude, this hired hand is going to turn tail and run at the first sign of danger.

What happens to the sheep if no one cares for them? Obviously they will be attacked. You can almost see the blood dripping from the fangs of the wolf as he snatches a defenseless lamb. And what about the rest of the flock? They will scatter, but without a shepherd, they too may die.

The wolf represents danger, life threatening danger. Behind all such attacks on God’s sheep, we need to recognize the devil is that roaring lion who goes around seeking those whom he may devour. How comforting it is to know and how grateful we ought to be that we have a shepherd who is willing to lay down his life for the sheep. Christ’s great love compelled him to walk the way of the cross so that wandering sheep like you and me might be rescued eternally from the jaws of danger, from the devil and the everlasting fires of hell which we deserve because of our sins.

Jesus now proceeds to bring all attention back to himself. He repeats the words, *“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.”* Jesus has already shown how good he was because he was willing to sacrifice himself for the sheep. But what good would it do for an earthly shepherd to fight with a wolf and lose? If the shepherd is dead, if the fight is lost, then the sheep are, pardon the expression, sitting ducks. The wolf will polish them off after all.

Jesus shows, however, that he not only loves the sheep above all else, but he has the power to do something for them. That power is first of all evidenced in Jesus’ knowledge of his flock. Earlier in this same chapter, Jesus described the close relationship that develops between a faithful shepherd and his flock. The sheep learn to know their master by his voice. And because of the way he always cares for them, they trust him. They follow him wherever he leads. The shepherd on the other hand also gets to know his flock. He keeps track of which ones are feeble and which ones are sick and which ones are about to give birth and so forth. Shepherd and sheep come to know each other so well because they have been together so long and have been through so much. Remembering this, we can drink in the deep comfort of hearing Jesus say to us, “I am the Good Shepherd; I know my sheep.”

Jesus is speaking about his followers, us, those who know him by faith. Jesus knows us, each and every one of us, through and through. He knows us by name. He knows our needs. He knows our wants. He knows our problems. He knows our pain. He knows our desires. We can trust this Good Shepherd. His love stands firm. His protection is certain and secure. He is as close to us as his Father is with him. He is

the very one who has substituted himself for us so that we might have eternal life, a place in that home that he has prepared for us as we heard in our Gospel reading this morning.

The concluding verses of our text summarize God's entire plan of salvation. Jesus, our Good Shepherd, went into death voluntarily. No one took his life from him. He had the authority to lay it down and to take it up again. According to plan, Christ would go through death suffering even the agonies of hell on that cross in order to make full payment for the sins of the world, for your sins and for my sins. Also according to God's plan, Jesus would rise again from the dead, having conquered sin, death and hell for us. This was the work that the Father commissioned our Good Shepherd to do.

So today we rejoice in the work that our Good Shepherd has accomplished for us. He has indeed rescued us from the clutches of Satan and from the eternal sufferings of hell. Be assured that he will continue to bless and watch over us until he takes us to that eternal home that he has prepared for us in heaven. May God grant that to all of us for Jesus' sake.