

“The GOOD Shepherd”

You are likely familiar with the I AM sayings of Jesus. Jesus says – I AM the bread of life – I AM the light of the world – I AM the door – I AM the resurrection and the life – I AM the way, and the truth, and the life – I AM the true vine --- and, as we have here in our text, I AM the Good Shepherd. You hear these and focus on the light, the door, the vine – and you may miss an important part of who Jesus is.

What you may not be familiar with is why Jesus says I AM. With this language, He is saying that He is the God who spoke to Moses from the burning bush (when Moses asks, “who do I say sent me,” the Lord said, “I AM”). Jesus is the God of the Old Testament – the One who delivers His people from bondage, and leads them to the Promised Land.

But there is more going on with His “I AM the Good Shepherd” statement. The word used here for “good” is the one used at creation. God brings all things into being by the power of His Word – He sets all things in their proper order – He names His creation – and when God sees all that He has made, He declares it to be “very good.”

Jesus, the Good Shepherd – is the God of the Old Testament – He is the God of creation – the God whose shepherding is “good.” The Lord is my shepherd – Jesus, who shepherds Israel into the green pastures and besides the still waters of the land flowing with milk and honey – He leads in paths of righteousness, through the valley of the shadow of death – preparing a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

We hear the language of “shepherd” (the Lord is my shepherd, Good Shepherd) – and we think of shepherds as those who fed and lead the sheep – but another important part of their work is protecting the sheep. Which makes sense – that the Lord who creates life – sustains that life, by protecting that life.

Jesus, our Good Shepherd, says – “I know my own, and my own know me.” His sheep know His voice – they hear His voice and follow Him. And that’s “good” – the “very good” that God intends for His creation. To say that Jesus is our “good” shepherd – is to say that, by His voice, He is at work for the benefit of others – for you, His sheep.

By His life-giving Word – the Good Shepherd gathers you, feeds you, leads you, and protects you.

The threat to your life comes from the wolves who attack the flock. They are other voices – voices contrary to the voice of the Good Shepherd – voices that are “not good,” even deadly.

In order to bless you – to provide you with what is “good” – the Good Shepherd’s voice says – “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.” He says, “Do not neglect to meet together as is the habit of some ...”

The voice of the wolf says that gathering around the Word and Sacraments of Jesus Christ is optional – that you’re only going to church to show others how holy you are. The wolves seek to scatter you from Christ and His path of righteousness – away from His Table of forgiveness – His defeat of death. The wolves seek to keep you away from all that is “good” for you.”

The wolves attack – and the hireling flees. He has no skin in the game – the sheep don’t belong to him – he doesn’t care about them – “they’re not mine.” And the wolves come to snatch away. Their voice asks – are you male or female? Not, did God create you as male or female – but what do YOU think – what do you determine your gender to be? In other words – you take the place of the Creator and say who you are.

The Good Shepherd says, that’s “not good.” You’re playing God, and you’re not! This will not go well for you. Not only are you living contrary to the “good” that God has created you to be – living contrary to your true, created self – you are living in direct opposition to God!

The wolves attack, attempting to scatter the flock – seeking to get you off by yourself, away from the Church – where you are vulnerable. And the voice sounds like this. “Do you really think that God can love someone like you? He knows you – He knows the evil things you have done – do you really think that He’s going to forgive you without expecting something in return?”

These are the voices and kinds of danger that surround you each day – lurking in the shadows. The devil prowls around like a roaring lion – or a wolf – seeking whom he may devour.

And the voices you hear are tempting. After all, it seems like the majority of people are following those voices. The supposed experts tell us such things are “good.” But what did Jesus, the Good Shepherd say? “I know my own and my own know me.” My sheep “listen to my voice” and they follow me.

Folks, coming to church to hear God’s Word and receive His sacraments is “good.” It is “good” to be male – it is “good” to be female – just as God created you. Listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd – and follow where He leads. He knows you – and He is GOOD for you.]

The key to His goodness is that He “lays down His life for the sheep.” All that Jesus says and does is for your good – to sustain your life which He created – to feed you, to lead you, to protect you. He lays down His life – so that you may live.

It is “good” to know Christ and His sacrifice in your place. It is “good” to know and believe that He had shed His blood to atone for the sin of the whole world – including all your sin. Where you have gone astray, been scattered by the “not good” voices of the wolves – the Good Shepherd seeks you out, finds you, and returns you to His flock.

He who laid down His life for you continues to shepherd you through this world. To hear and know His voice is so important – for by His Word – He is leading us in His righteousness, even through the valley of the shadow of death, to the Promised Land of heaven.

God grant you His Holy Spirit, that you may hear the voice of your Good Shepherd, and follow Him. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.