

ADVENT SERMON SERIES:
CALL HIS NAME JESUS (3) SHELTERED BY THE SHEPHERD
DECEMBER 16, 2018,
REV. PATRICIA WEATHERWAX

Psalm 23

Revelation 7:13-17

John 10:14-18 (NRSV) Hear the good news. Jesus says:

I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. 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. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No 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."

INTRODUCTION What's in a metaphor?

We talked about Jesus being the Lamb of God, last week and lots of other times, too. Today we think about another name for Jesus. Jesus calls himself our "Good Shepherd". There's a long list of metaphors we use to talk about a triune (3 persons in one God). God: creator, redeemer and sustainer, Father, Son and Spirit, Light, Power, King, Morning Star, Rock, etc. Shepherd is one of those metaphors- descriptors we use a lot, to help us understand God better.

The idea behind using metaphors is to find ways to help describe the indescribable. Somewhere recently I read (how's that for a citation?) that metaphors help us understand "the strange majesty of Jesus Christ". Jesus being the "good shepherd" certainly is a strange way to describe his majesty. Neither a lamb or a shepherd are viewed as majestic.

I like the "Yes, no and more so" metaphor analysis of Johanna Bos, Old Testament professor emerita at Louisville Presbyterian seminary. She suggested we approach our names for God/Jesus and metaphors as "Yes, that's a good description, and "No, this is how it falls short"; and "More So"-- that God is always the supremely best form of any description- more than we can "ask or imagine" (Eph 3:20).

That would work for this. Today though, let's look at the Shepherd, past, present and future.

PAST

The first reference to God as shepherd comes in Genesis 48:15. Jacob referred to: "The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, The God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day..."

Shepherds were understood to be caring leaders. There's a beautiful passage in Ezekiel (Ezk 34:11-24), where God explains that a shepherd will come from the line of David, that there will be ONE shepherd to feed and lead.

This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered (Ezekiel 34:11-12).

And the prophet Jeremiah laid the groundwork for the GOOD shepherd by describing the bad shepherds: leaders that were "stupid" and "divisive". (Not my word- Jeremiah's

words!) The prophet notes that the sheep (citizens) had scattered because of the awful job the shepherds had done. “The shepherds are stupid, and do not inquire of the LORD; therefore they have not prospered, and all their flock is scattered” (Jeremiah 10:21).

Sp, when Jesus declared, “I am the Good Shepherd,” He is pulling from these well-known Old Testament references. He’s making bold statements about Himself, and his divinity. It’s more of those in-your-face “I am” statements that sound gentle, “I am the good shepherd”, but was really Jesus stating that “the Old Testament shepherding God you heard about- that’s me. God and I are one”.

Jesus declared himself the shepherd of God’s people who are consistently referred to as his sheep. Jesus, born in a barn like a little lamb, as an innocent child was born to be our shepherd. Shepherds came to see the amazing newborn that angels sang about. The stable is the few places where the shepherds were welcomed. There probably wouldn’t have been room at the inn for *them*, either.

At the appropriate time, when all was ready and God’s time was fulfilled, Jesus was given authority. He received the authority of God to be the Shepherd over his flock. Of us. All of us.

Jesus says he’s the *good* shepherd, not like Jeremiah’s shepherds who let things get out of control. Good shepherd. The Greek adjective used, *kalos* doesn’t imply just morally good, in a right-versus-wrong way, but good as in: lovely, strong, powerful, gracious and noble. Jesus is the highest quality, “the extramostbestest” shepherd, the “more than” all others shepherd. He **was** the good shepherd.

PRESENT

And he still is our good shepherd. The infant who became a shepherd (also known as the Lamb), had a special ancestor- the great King David of Israel, who was also a shepherd. David told us what this shepherd does for the flock in his care. The Good Shepherd’s sheep can say, “I shall not want,” because the Shepherd’s every thought is for the care of the flock. The good shepherd protects and leads, knowing what the sheep need. He finds green pastures and leads them to drink from still water. (Do you remember from our Psalm 23 series that sheep are fearful around moving water?) He searches out safe pathways for sheep to walk and defends from danger. He drives off enemies that would harm the flock, and safely and gently guides his sheep. “Gentle shepherd, come and lead *us*”.

Sheep and goats are both surprisingly expressive of affection and trust. They will readily recognize their shepherd as opposed to a stranger. A herd will gather around their herder looking for food and physical contact, but will be wary if someone unknown approaches. Jesus refers to this when he speaks of sheep knowing, recognizing, and following their shepherd’s voice (John 10:3-5).

We need a shepherd to rescue us and to show the way, now. Jesus told a beautiful shepherd parable, we read it in Matthew 18:12-14. This is from *the Voice*.

A shepherd in charge of 100 sheep notices that one of his sheep has gone astray. What do you think he should do? Should the shepherd leave the flock on the hills unguarded to search for the lost sheep? *God’s shepherd goes to look for that one lost sheep*, and when he finds her, he is happier about her return than he is about the 99 who stayed put. Your Father in heaven does not want a single one of the *tripped, waylaid, stumbling* little ones to be lost.

The gospel of our LORD, Jesus, the good shepherd!

When I first started visiting First Pres members, almost 10 years ago, I took notes about things I'd learned about people. I'd written down that Orlo Baas liked the song "The Ninety and Nine". I found that page of notes when preparing Norma's memorial service. The note brought me some sweet childhood memories and a little irony. My oldest brother had a lovely bass voice used to sing "The Ninety and Nine" as a solo when I was very young. I knew it was an old song, but I hadn't known how old- it was written in 1868. Orlo and my big brother died in the same week. Do you know about the Ninety and Nine? Are you the Ninety and Nine or are you the other one?

There were ninety and nine that safely lay
In the shelter of the fold;
But one was out on the hills away,
Far off from the gates of gold.
Away on the mountains wild and bare;
Away from the tender Shepherd's care.
Away from the tender Shepherd's care.

"Lord, Thou hast here Thy ninety and nine;
Are they not enough for Thee?"
But the Shepherd made answer: "This of Mine
Has wandered away from Me.
And although the road be rough and steep,
I go to the desert to find My sheep.
I go to the desert to find My sheep" ...

And all through the mountains, thunder-riven,
And up from the rocky steep,
There arose a glad cry to the gate of heav'n,
"Rejoice! I have found My sheep!"
And the angels echoed around the throne,
"Rejoice, for the Lord brings back His own!
Rejoice, for the Lord brings back His own!"

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You may have seen on the church's Facebook page: "Each of us is an innkeeper who decides if there is room". And while that is a true metaphor, we also need to keep in mind that we have a persistently good, persistent good shepherd, who pursues us and might not take 'no' as our final answer. He is our good shepherd, who wants all of us, those already, and those not yet in the fold. The Good Shepherd is searching for us, to bring us home.

FUTURE

The epistle lesson from Rev. 7 that was our call to worship for today, gave us a glimpse into that eternal home, where we, with all of the redeemed sheep, *will* stand before the throne of God and the Lamb. We will have a place among that countless multitude, people from every nation, who have passed through the valley of the shadow of death, led to safety by their Shepherd.

We *will* stand before that throne, our sins washed away by the Lamb who is, and has always been, our Shepherd. We will rest in safety and heavenly peace, singing our hallelujahs. We will feast at the banquet table and drink from the water of the river of life. God will wipe away the tears from our eyes, and we will find shelter *forever* in the arms of our good Shepherd. Because:

The King of love my shepherd is,
Whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am his
And he is mine forever.
Perverse and foolish oft I strayed,
But yet in love he sought me,
And on his shoulder gently laid
And home rejoicing brought me.

There's no place like home, our heavenly home. We will be with our good shepherd, forever. So stand with me to affirm your faith, with the words of the 23rd Psalm:

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

Psalm 23 NKJV

The Lord *is* my shepherd;
I shall not want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.
He restores my soul;
He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil;
For You *are* with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup runs over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord
Forever.