

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

PSALM 23
JOHN 10:1-18

A SERMON FOR EASTERTIDE
SUNDAY, APRIL 26, 2015
First Presbyterian Church
Marianna Florida
Ted W. Land, Interim Pastor
To be delivered by Joe Busby

There is such a wealth of wisdom and truth in this morning's lessons that someone could preach a different sermon every Sunday for a year and never exhaust all the meaning that is in these texts.

The 23rd Psalm is the most memorized, most recited of the Psalms.

The words of Jesus that John quotes here are full of such rich images, such good examples. One could take almost every phrase in the passage and preach on that theme.

The Good Shepherd is often used as a model, an example for pastors.

But Jesus isn't really speaking about pastors. Ted Land says, "Pastors are at best "undershepherds." On a good day, a good pastor will do well to make "sheepdog." On most days, we are just the sheep in front of all the other sheep.

Jesus alone is the good shepherd, the one who lays down His life for the sheep.

Jesus uses images in this discourse that would have been familiar in the Middle East for four thousand years. Many would be familiar in some places today. The lives of shepherds and goat herders and camel herders in the Middle East are still closely tied to the land and the animals.

One of the basic differences between a sheep herder and a true shepherd is obvious in what Jesus told His disciples. A sheep herder herds sheep.

If you've ever been to one of the rodeos where mutton busting was an event, you've seen sheep herded. Usually it is by a sheep dog. To watch a good sheep dog drive a bunch of sheep around the arena, finally loading them in a trailer, is a marvelous display of training and talent.

But if that sheep dog led out across the arena barking, the sheep would not follow it. If the trainer of the dog called the sheep, they would not come to him. If he walked away from them, calling to them, they would not follow.

Jesus tells us that the shepherd calls his sheep by name, and that he goes before them, and they follow him.

Imagine that! A man calls the sheep out of the sheepfold, and they follow him!

Understand that there might be sheep of a dozen shepherds intermingled in that pen. It is sort of like the old cow camps here in Florida, back in the days of open range. They'd pen all the cattle up in a corral, for the purpose of sorting, branding, doctoring, dipping for ticks.

But I'll bet that if a cattleman had gone to the gate of the corral, and called his cows by name, they wouldn't have come to him. And if he led out, they might have followed him. But it would have been out of curiosity and herd instinct, not because they knew his voice, and trusted him enough to follow him.

The Lands have a little herd of cows. Polly has given them all names, but they wouldn't come if called them by name. Ted has a call that he can utter, a noise he makes, somewhere between a whoop and a holler, and they'll come running in to the cow pens. They associate that noise with feeding time!

The only time those cows will follow is when someone's got a bucket of feed for them.

Jesus never herded His disciples. He led them. Jesus never used a stick. He never used a bucket of feed to bribe them.

From the moment He called His first disciples beside the Sea of Galilee, it was "Follow me..." and they did.

When Jesus made that last appearance to the seven apostles beside the same sea, His words to Simon Peter, after He had told him three times to take care of His sheep, were, "Follow me."

It might be easier if Jesus would herd us, if He would use the rod and staff to steer us like the shepherds of old.

We can't always discern where Jesus is leading us. We can't always see His path before us. We don't always hear the voice of the Good Shepherd calling to us. The sights and sounds of the world around blind and deafen. Too many bright lights. Too many voices. We lose our way. We lose sight of the Good Shepherd. We cannot hear Him.

One of our tasks as Christians, as followers of Jesus, is to get others to follow Him as well.

When you are following, it is hard to get others to follow. They may not see Jesus out in front. They may not hear His voice. They may look at you, and at the others following Jesus, and say, "I don't want to be like these folks." Or, "These people are nuts!" But if they can meet Jesus, if they can encounter Jesus, if they can come to know Jesus, then they can become His followers, and take Him with them, too.

Part of our responsibility as Christians is to introduce Jesus to those who don't even know that they are the sheep of His pasture, much less that He is the Good Shepherd.

The Good Shepherd who lay down His life for the sheep said, "Follow me." But the last thing He told us was, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Let us pray.

Lord, help us to learn how to follow where you lead us. Be our Shepherd and our Friend. In your name, Jesus, we pray. Amen.