

In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Intro

What do you think of when you hear Jesus say, “I am the Good Shepherd?”

What images come to mind?

Perhaps you see a Tiffany Stained Glass Window of Jesus gently carrying a sheep—like the one in the Chapel at Conejo Mountain.

Possibly you see a Palestinian Shepherd lounging under a tree as his sheep gently graze.

Perhaps you envision a Scottish Shepherd following his flock “o’er the heather,” with his faithful Sheltie herding them along.

Or maybe you think of the Looney Tunes loyal Sheep Dog—SAM—who faithfully punches his time card every day to foil the attempts of the Coyote to steal his sheep.

This is simply to say that ALL of us have images come to mind when Jesus says, “I am the Good Shepherd.”

I. About Shepherds

A. This image is not original with Jesus.

1. The OT contains many images of Shepherds—both good and bad.
2. Isaiah uses this imagery to describe the Lord as a Shepherd leading God's people home from exile.
3. Jeremiah used the same imagery, contrasting God's Shepherding care with the irresponsible actions of Israel's Kings, or Shepherds.
4. Ezekiel also chastised Israel's Kings, speaking of a future when the Lord would come as a Good Shepherd.

B. And, of course, there is the most famous portrayal of God as SHEPHERD, that we just said—**The 23rd Psalm**.

1. It is a Psalm of TRUST—trust in God.
2. Instead of lamenting, “Why, God, why?”
 - The Psalm simply states, “The Lord is my shepherd...”
3. The Lord **IS** the Shepherd of the people, whose Rod defends them from enemies and whose Staff guides them.

II. Jesus as Good Shepherd

A. Against this backdrop, Jesus says, *“I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the Sheep.”*

1. Being a Shepherd in Jesus’ day was no light thing.
2. The Shepherd was **absolutely responsible** for the sheep.
3. If anything happened to the sheep, the Shepherd had to produce some kind of proof that it was not his fault.
4. To the Shepherd, it was the most natural thing in the world to risk his life in defense of the flock.
5. Sometimes the Shepherd had to do more than risk his life; sometimes he had to lay it down, perhaps when thieves or wild animals came to pillage and plunder the flock.

B. Jesus contrasts the Good Shepherd with one who is only a hired hand.

1. *“The hired hand, who is not the Shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.*

- The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep.”

2. A real Shepherd was born to the task.

3. He was sent out with the flock as soon as he was old enough to go;
- The sheep became his friends and companions;
- And it became second nature to think of them before he thought of himself.

4. But the hired hand was just doing a job—it was not a calling—he simply was trying to get out of it as much pay as he could.

5. He had no sense of responsibility for the Sheep—he was only a hired hand.

C. 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.”*

1. Jesus knows his Sheep—each one individually—and each one knows him; and Jesus’ knowledge of his sheep is as immensely personal as is God’s knowing him.

2. Jesus’ love is so deep—that he lays down his life for the sheep—and that is exactly what he did.

3. He laid it down so that he could take it up again and give all of us NEW LIFE in God, and thus opening for us a NEW RELATIONSHIP with God.

4. I know I’m starting to sound like a broken record—but our new RELATIONSHIP with God truly is a theme for this post-Easter season.

5. You see, when Jesus uses the word “**KNOW**,” He isn’t referring to the accumulation of knowledge.

6. In this sense, **knowledge is RELATIONSHIP**, and the ultimate expression of that relationship is the way God the Father knows Jesus and Jesus knows God.

7. And then Jesus EXTENDS that relationship He has with God to US: *“I **know** my own and my own **know** me, just as the Father **knows** me and I **know** the Father.”*

III. Relationship with the Shepherd

A. And the way we live out this relationship can be seen in our **New Testament Reading**.

1. As we read in the first part of the reading, last week: “See what **LOVE** the Father has given us, that we should be called Children of God; and that is what we are.”

2. And now the reading goes on to spell out how WE are to live as “Children of God”—as “Sheep of the Good Shepherd”:

- *“We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and that we ought to lay down our lives for one another...”*

- *“Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.”*

3. Our response to this LOVE so freely shared with us is to share it with others that they, too, may be part of the flock.

4. We are to show as much love for each other as Jesus showed for us though self-giving and loving care.

5. However, as we read earlier, this love is not simple sentiment, but concrete ACTIONS for the welfare of others.

6. As John goes on to say, “This is God’s commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another; just as he has commanded us.”

B. But how do we do this?

1. There is a video going around on Facebook of a sheep and its shepherd—I put it on the St. Columba’s Facebook page—give it a look—**AFTER CHURCH**.

2. As the video opens, the sheep is caught face down in a ditch along the side of the road.

3. So, the Shepherd comes along—puts a strap around the sheep’s leg and pulls it out.

4. And the sheep is so happy that it runs and skips down the road and jumps over the ditch again—only to end up face first in the ditch again—just a few yards down the road.

5. We are so like that sheep.

6. We get all excited—Easter is here!—Christ is risen!—and we jump and skip all around and run off to do great things—and then SPLAT—we are back in the ditch—up to our ears in dirt and muck—totally in the dark and falling back into our old habits again.

C. So, then what can we do?

- How are we to respond to this amazing gift God has given us?
- How can we express our faith through action?

1. How do we reach out in love to those in need?

- How do we assist the **Good Shepherd** so that there may be ONE flock and ONE Shepherd?

2. Perhaps this thought by **Mother Teresa** may help; she writes:

- “Many people mistake our work for our vocation. Our vocation is the love of Jesus.”

3. Everything we do should be for the LOVE of Jesus:

- every action we take,
- every decision we make
- should be for the LOVE of Jesus.

4. How we do this is up to us.

- But we are called to live our lives making this so.

5. As restrictions begin to relax, and we are beginning to open our doors again, how do we respond to this—as individuals and as a parish?

6. This is part of our new reality that we must wrestle with in the days and weeks to come.

- How are we called to express our faith through action?

Conclusion

“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.”

“This is God’s commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another; just as he has commanded us.”

“Many people mistake our work for our vocation.

Our vocation is the love of Jesus.”

Let Us Pray

O God, whose Son Jesus is the good shepherd of your people: Grant that when we hear his voice we may know him who calls us each by name, and follow where he leads; who, with you and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. AMEN. (Collect - Easter 4)