

4/25/2010

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY Almighty God, merciful Father, since You have wakened from death the Shepherd of Your sheep, grant us Your Holy Spirit that when we hear the voice of our Shepherd we may know Him who calls us each by name and follow where He leads; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

THE PSALM

Psalm 23

THE EPISTLE LESSON Revelation 7:9-17 (*Our Good Shepherd guides us to springs of living water.*)

9 After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. 10 And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

11 All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"

13 Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes-- who are they, and where did they come from?" 14 I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. 16 Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. 17 For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

THE GOSPEL LESSON John 10:22-30 (*The Shepherd's flock listen to His voice.*)

22 Then came the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, 23 and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon's Colonnade. 24 The Jews gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." 25 Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, 26 but you do not believe because you are not my sheep.

27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one."

Parallel Passage John 10:11-18

11 "I am the good shepherd. **The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.**

12 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.

13 The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

14 **"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me--**

15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father-- and I lay down my life for the sheep.

16 I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.

17 The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life-- only to take it up again.

18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."

INTRO - It is Spring in Alaska again. Last week I heard my first geese for 2010. Soon we will see the families of geese following their mother. You know the ones. Sometimes even traffic stops to let a family of geese cross the road. The mother leads and 8 or 10 or 12 geese follow right in a row.

I. Please remember that word "follow," and consider the words of Jesus in our lesson for today. **27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.**

A. First of all, please realize Jesus is speaking of a relationship, here a relationship between sheep and a shepherd rather than a goose and her goslings.

1. Jesus emphasizes the personal nature of this relationship with the word, "My." These are just any sheep. These are Jesus' sheep.

2. First, Jesus sheep listen to His voice. In other words, they hear and believe what Jesus says to them about being their shepherd, the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep.

3. And, these sheep who hear Jesus' voice and believe him, also FOLLOW Him.

B. Today, as we look at Jesus' call to how we are to live, I want you to consider how sheep follow a shepherd.

1. Remember, the sheep and shepherd have a relationship. They trust Him, and he feeds them. He guides them, and he protects them. He treats them with care.

2. Following Jesus means not only obedience for the shepherd, but it means a relationship of caring for other sheep.

3. Two chapters later in this Gospel of John we will hear Jesus put following Him in another way. **34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.**

4. A very important part of following our shepherd is loving and caring for His other sheep.

C. We can even look at the love Jesus sheep, his people have for one another as we consider the relationship between sheep and shepherd.

1. A shepherd feeds the sheep. Christians in Scripture are called to provide for themselves so they can care for those in need.

2. A shepherd guides the sheep to safe pasture. God's people, rather than pointing to ourselves as the shepherd, point one another to the Good Shepherd, Jesus, and to his words, and His call. In other words, we encourage one another in faith.

3. A shepherd protects the sheep. When someone is in trouble, God's

people gather around that person with love and care.

4. As God's sheep have a relationship with our Shepherd of trust and loving obedience, we should have a relationship where we treat one another in love and trust.

II. If there is one thing the Bible says about sheep, it is that they often go astray. We are called to be in a relationship of trust and love with our Lord and other Christians. But, there are times we go astray.

A. Sometimes we trust ourselves, our own judgement, rather than the guidance our shepherd gives us. At the time trusting ourselves seems wise. In all honesty, it never is.

B. Sometimes we selfishly take care of our own wants and needs, rather than watching out for the physical and spiritual needs of those around us. Instead of caring for one another, we can hurt one another.

C. Sometimes the job of loving as the shepherd does can seem overwhelming, so we don't even try.

III. Loving one another as God's people, as fellow sheep, means following the shepherd, not trusting ourselves.

A. John 10 tells us that Jesus is the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep. John 13 tells us that we love one another as we have been loved.

1. We actually don't have the strength to love one another on our own.

2. But Jesus laid His life down to forgive our sins.

3. We love one another, not so much with our love, but by pointing to and sharing with one another the love of the Savior.

B. The good thing is that when we fail, we can keep loving each other, because we are forgiven.

1. Our strength to love one another does not so much come from our ability, but from our shepherd.

2. But, when we are pointing to our shepherd, God's people are like a large family that acts in love and care and protection for one another.

C. Today, in our worship we are recognizing a special group of care givers.

1. Stephen Ministers are people who commit themselves to caring for God's sheep in time of need.

2. They do this confidentially, so we don't always know they are even present. But Stephen Ministers make a large difference in the lives of God's people by pointing others to Jesus' love.

3. Today we commission leaders, and you are invited to consider being Christian care givers, "Sharing Christ's love with people, through people" by attending a training class which begins next Fall.

CONCLUSION - This past week we saw a wonderful example of God's sheep caring for one another. The previous week long time member Dave Miranda passed away at a young age from cancer. Our church reached out to care for and even

protect his family members with an out pouring of love. Not only was the church packed for his funeral, but what happened afterward was classic Christian love. There was food and wishes of love that lasted for hours as people pointed to the hope we have in Jesus. That's a family. That's how we follow the shepherd, but caring for and loving one another.