

February 3, 2019
Why Do I Need A Shepherd?
John 10:10-30

One of the best-loved passages in Scripture is Psalm 23: "*The Lord is my shepherd.*" One of the familiar metaphors Jesus uses to describe Himself is "the Good Shepherd." I want to ask a hard-nosed question this morning: "Why do I need a 'shepherd?'" I've seen sheep ... and, with all due respect, I resent being compared to them. I'm a relatively bright, educated, "together" person ... why do I need a shepherd?

The Good Shepherd: We all need a Friend

Read John 10:7-13 as a description of contemporary culture. Jesus is saying there are thieves and wolves out there. He does not paint a rosy picture of human nature and human culture ... We, in Canada, have tended to live safe and comfortable lives. But reading the news we know what most of the world has always known: evil is real.

Who are the thieves and robbers? First, we can think of thieves and robbers as things ... things which rob of us of our contentment. Things that steal our peace and passion. It may be our choices of books, TV shows, internet sites or other things that steal our peace. It may be surrounding ourselves with so much technology that when things go wrong we get angry and frustrated because we cannot function without it. It may be wanting the new gadget so much, but not being able to afford it.

Second, we can think of the thieves and robbers as people. They are evil people ... the obvious ones who make the headlines. There are also not so obvious ones ... the legalists who steal our joy, making us feel badly for our imperfections. The judgy-ones who steal our self-worth by making us feel guilty. The ones who tell you have to follow their – only their – teaching; everyone else is wrong. The ones who give us false hope (God will only bless you) and leave our dreams dashed when problems come.

Jesus draws a wonderful contrast between the hired hand and the good shepherd. The hired hand runs away when the thief comes. Who are the hired hands? There are any number of authors, ideas, philosophies, books, even religious leaders who offer their own personal recipes for life. If you follow their method, they promise, your problems will disappear. If you put your faith in them (and give them money), they will heal your relationships, your finances, even your illnesses.

But when your relationships are still a mess, when your debts are still overwhelming, when your prognosis is still challenging – where are those authors? Where are the TV gurus? Where are the faith healers? Where are the internet superstars?

James Penner, former local IVCF staffer and author, says the number one goal of **18-22 year-old males** is ... to find **an unshockable friend**. Someone who doesn't run when you're honest. Jesus is an unshockable friend. We need that kind of Good Shepherd in our lives. We can tell Him anything. We can come with our pasts, our problems, our

dreams, our hopes ... He will not be shocked. He will not run away. He will be there with you and for you.

The number one goal of **18-22 year-old females** is **not to be judged**. We need that kind of Good Shepherd in our lives. Jesus came, not to condemn but to save (John 3:10-21). Sometimes we can feel like very small pawns on the chessboard of life. But the good news about Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is that there are no small players. He does not judge us on our appearance, ability, or even behaviour. We are all his sheep; each of us is unique and infinitely precious. If one sheep strays, He will go after him, regardless of which one of us that sheep is (Luke 15:1-7). He is with you and for you.

The ultimate place we need a Good Shepherd is **as we face our own mortality**. As a culture we do not deal well with death. We don't teach a high school course, "Death 30: Coping with Death." We certainly don't teach "Death 1000: Dying Well." The self-help gurus help you achieve your dreams here on Earth, but that's where it ends. Some religious teachers will promise you an end to sickness and a BMW thrown into the bargain (if you have enough faith). Where are they when you need help most? When you face ultimate questions? They've run away. They offer no hope. You're alone.

Where is Jesus, the Good Shepherd, when you need help most? He is right beside you. *"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart. I have overcome the world ... I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* (John 16:33, Matthew 28:20). That's hope. Jesus' promise is He will always be there. He will not run away. He loves you so much, He lays down His life for you. He had the authority to lay down His life for you – He did. And He had the authority to rise from the dead for you – He did. His rock-solid assurance is that He also has the authority to raise you from the dead – He will.

The Good Shepherd: We all need a Guide

The rhetoric of our age has told us to blaze our own trail. To find our own way. To create our own values. It is interesting, however, that few of us really do that.

In university a small group of us tried ... we tried to create our own set of values, ethics, and ways of living we thought that really worked. It was hard work. And at the end of the day we found we are not as original as we hoped we'd be. What we found was, we had come up with the values, ethics, and ways of living Jesus taught. We couldn't improve on Him. We were disappointed, but we were also empowered. We recognized that there is a vision of life, the universe, and everything that was worth throwing our heart, soul, mind, strength ... our whole being into. The vision that Jesus gives us.

It's a vision of life that starts with saying something about who Jesus is. It starts with saying some things about the Good Shepherd ... He is the unshockable friend; He is the one who does not judge us. He is the one who leads us through the dark valleys. He accepts us as we are, where we are. He loves us too much to leave us lost.

Jesus also tells us who we really are... we are the unique, precious sheep in His keeping.

Jesus gives us identity. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, knows us each by name. In Hebrew thought, "*knowing someone's name*" means you knew the person intimately. You love the person. You are a close friend of that person. Jesus is saying is that He knows you intimately He is your closest companion, closer than a brother. He loves you.

*Jesus shapes our spirituality. **WE ALL** have a spirituality: core values that shape who we are and how we live, hope (or no hope) about life, the universe, and everything. Jesus calls us to love God with all our hearts, souls minds, and strengths. He calls us to nurture a burning passion to love God ... and to develop Christ-like qualities within our own lives. "Since you have been raised to new life with Christ," says Paul, "set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits at God's right hand in the place of honor and power. Let heaven fill your thoughts. Do not think only about things down here on earth"* (Colossians 3:1-4).

Jesus can lead us in the practicalities of life with others. Jesus says, simply: "Love your neighbour as yourself." Jesus told the story of a man who cared for a stranger in need (the Good Samaritan). In very practical terms, Paul says: "Put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual sin, impurity, lust, and shameful desires. Don't be greedy for the good things of this life, for that is idolatry. God's terrible anger will come upon those who do such things. You used to do them when your life was still part of this world. But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language. Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old evil nature and all its wicked deeds. In its place you have clothed yourselves with a brand-new nature that is continually being renewed as you learn more and more about Christ, who created this new nature within you" (Colossians 3:5-10).

This is not a promise of a life of comfort. It is the promise of a mission ... a mission to be salt and light in a broken and dark world. A mission to make our corner of the world a better place, a brighter place, a place of healing and hope. Jesus prays, (John 17:14:16): "*I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one. ... As you sent me into the world, I have sent them in to the world ...*"

Think of your life as a bright light shining in the darkness of your world. That's a challenge. It's also a purpose and a hope.

The Good Shepherd: We all need community

Jesus brings us together as "one flock" with "one shepherd." His vision for the church is to be a community where we do genuinely "*Love one another.*" Paul adds, "*In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us. Since God chose you to be the holy people whom he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. You must make allowance for each other's faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember,*

the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. And the most important piece of clothing you must wear is love. Love is what binds us all together in perfect harmony. And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are all called to live in peace. And always be thankful. Let the words of Christ, in all their richness, live in your hearts and make you wise. Use his words to teach and counsel each other. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. And whatever you do or say, let it be as a representative of the Lord Jesus, all the while giving thanks through him to God the Father" (Colossians 3:11-17).

Jesus prays for us (John 17:23): *"May they be brought into complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."*

There is a tremendous challenge here for us. Like Jesus, we need to be inclusive, not exclusive. We need to be unshockable friends. We need to be those who come alongside others without judging them. We need to define our faith positively – by the grand vision of who God has called us to be ... people who love Him with passion, people who love our neighbours with genuine compassion, a community united by our faith in Jesus, people who are salt and light. Let's not define ourselves negatively by a list of rules and regulations, and who and what we are against. That's what thieves do.

Why do I need a Good Shepherd? Because I need an unshockable friend. I need someone who loves me, not someone who judges me. ***Why do I need a shepherd?*** Because I need a guide and a transforming vision ... I need something bigger than myself to give meaning and shape to my life. ***Why do I need a shepherd?*** Because I need a community to belong to. We may not be perfect, but our desire (I trust) is to follow Jesus. And day-by-day we're getting there.

Why do you need a Good Shepherd? Because you need an unshockable friend. You need someone who loves you, not someone who judges you. What do you need to do about that? ***Why do you need a shepherd?*** Because you need a guide and a transforming vision ... you need something bigger than yourself to give meaning and shape to your life. What do you need to do about that? ***Why do you need a shepherd?*** Because you need a community to belong to. What do you need to do about that?

We may not be perfect, but our desire (I trust) is to follow Jesus. And day-by-day we're getting there. Won't you come along on the journey?

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