

## John 10:1-18 “The Good Shepherd”

July 3, 2016

Our VBS theme and mission this year is all about Jesus, our Good Shepherd who cares for us, provides for us, leads us, forgives us, and bring us home. He provides everything we need. In fact, one paraphrase of Psalm 23 starts out this way: *“The Lord is my Shepherd, I have everything I need.”* Think about every gift you have from God. Is there anything you have that you haven’t been given?

Martin Luther gave us this list:

*I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them. He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life. He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil.*

Why does he do that? After all, we are unworthy sinners. Why should he take notice of us? And even more, why should he love us so?

*All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me.*

During Vacation Bible School this week, we will be focusing on the different gifts that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, in His mercy gives us. What gift would you put at the top of the list? Did you say the gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation? Did you say the gift of faith, which takes hold of forgiveness, life and salvation? Either way you get a gold star. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, who lays down His life for the sheep. He cares for us. He will do whatever it takes to rescue us and bring us home.

It’s always fun when people ask questions that you’ve never thought about before. This week’s question came from Psalm 23:5, *“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.”* The question is simple ... what does this mean? I should have known the answer right off, but I had to think on it for a while. First off, consider that the enemies of Christians in particular and of the Church (the bride of Christ) in general include the devil, the world, and our sinful nature. This world stands in opposition to God and to the people of God. What are we to think in the midst of this hostile environment? What are we to say when Ontario says that Trinity University School of Law graduates have degrees that will not be recognized? What are we to say when Christian doctors cannot follow their conscience in matters of assisted suicide?

The contrast between the world and believers grows bigger every day. In the midst of such opposition and hostility, what does Jesus our Good Shepherd do? He prepares a table before us in the presence of our enemies. When we are invited to sit at the table of the King of kings and Lord of lords, we become His allies, His friends, His family. He becomes our protector. He is our Shepherd. His army of angels are His guard dogs protecting the flock from any and all predators. The bottom line is this: Considering whose protection we live under, we can live in the peace that surpasses all understanding and our enemies better think twice about messing with us. Do you think that the world is going to win in its battle against the church? Just watch, just wait and see. Revelation 20:7-10 describes the ultimate end of all the forces of evil that threaten God’s people and stand in opposition to God. In the meantime, as enemies rise against the flock of God, here’s what God promises: Psalm 37:9-10

*“For evil men will be cut off, but those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land. A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found.”*

When we, by faith, sit at the King’s table, we need never be afraid, no matter how much the world and the devil may rail and plot against us. God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear ... (Psalm 46) Why ... A Mighty Fortress is our God! The enemy is real. The devil, the old, evil foe who seeks to destroy all the works of God to lead people away from God, his allies are sin and death. If sin can tempt us and death can hold us, then we are doomed. We would be lost forever unless a Saviour comes. So when Jesus came to be our Good Shepherd, what was He coming to do? He is the Saviour. He becomes one of us. He is the Lamb of God, coming to carry away the sin of the world. He hangs on a cruel cross where He suffers all that we deserve for our sins. The Shepherd dies for His sheep but death cannot hold Him. He breaks the power of death and rises again, giving to all who believe in Him the greatest gift of all, eternal life.

On Monday, our Bible lesson is from John 10. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He guards and looks after His sheep. He knows them all by name. He leads them. He provides for them. He keeps them safe. What a great gift to know that Jesus is with us every day!

On Tuesday we listen as Jesus does what David, in Psalm 23, said He would do. He brings us to green pastures and quiet waters. He feeds us and provides for us, even as He did for the 5,000 that He fed with five loaves and two fish.

On Wednesday, Jesus tells about a sower who went out to sow seeds. Some of the seed did well, other seed not so much. There was hard ground, rocky soil, and too many weeds. Many people today are looking for treasures, but not the kind of treasures that Jesus comes to bring. He says, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." But the full life many are seeking isn't life with God. They want life without God. They think that full life comes when I am at the center of the universe, self-absorbed, self-centered, self-seeking. My rights are most important. The unborn have no rights, and can be aborted and tossed in the garbage or sold for parts. We should just let the old and sick die when they infringe on my time. We should even help them out the door.

If you are looking for treasure, you have to listen to the Shepherd. Many don't like what He has to say. People prefer darkness to light. Scripture says that the day will come when people will not tolerate the truth but trade it for a lie. They will get preachers who will tell them only what their itching ears want to hear. Some of the seed, some of God's good Word falls on the path and gets trampled underfoot. People want nothing to do with what God has to say. Some of the seed falls among the weeds and gets choked out. They think that full life comes when I get to hear what I want to hear and many churches are overcome with weeds. They only preach and teach what people want to hear, instead of what God has to say. People want Jesus to bring them what they think is full life but the kind of full life they are seeking is a counterfeit. We want Him to tell us how to have a perfect marriage and family, how to be an expert parent, how to manage our wealth and blessings. And people get this picture of the Christian life as one with no hurts, no problems, no difficulties, no challenges.

Times haven't really changed. In Jesus' day, the people wanted a Messiah who would give them an abundant life, free from the Romans and their taxes and oppression. All those efforts to remain young will finally fail. All efforts to avoid death will finally fail. If you want to find abundant life, you will only find it with the Good Shepherd. To have life, you have to face death. To have life, you have to face the reality of death and the reality of sin. To have life, you have to step beyond death. You have to follow the voice of the Shepherd. He says, "My sheep hear my voice, I know them and they follow me, and I give them eternal life, and they shall not in any way ever perish."

Psalm 23 pictures an abundant life. You are welcomed at God's banquet with an anointing of oil and you are blessed beyond your dreams. Yes, there are valleys and dark places but it has abundance. The Shepherd brings comfort amid the valleys and dark places. The Shepherd bestows an eternal hope. The bottom line is this: How do you have a full life? What does full life consist in? If you were to ask Paul, he would say this... knowing and loving and serving Jesus in life, being with Him in death. *"For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain!"*

He says, *"Whatever was for my profit, I now consider a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ, and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes from Christ and is by faith"*

What is God's greatest gift? It is the righteousness of Christ that covers you and me and makes us saints in God's sight. In the Old Testament Ezekiel tells us that the day will come when "God Himself will be the shepherd for His sheep." When he wrote that, God's people were at one of their lowest points. They had been looking for treasure in idols and false gods. Their unfaithfulness and sin had led them away from God. Many of them were in exile in Babylon. Their country had been overrun by their enemies. Jerusalem had become a dusty heap of ruins. The few people who were left in Israel lived in poverty and misery. The picture of God as their Saviour and Shepherd was intended to give them hope and promise.

At the beginning of the movie Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade, Dr. Jones is teaching one of his college classes. He is talking with his students about searching for buried treasure and long lost artifacts. He researches books and old documents. He looks at ancient maps and considers legends and folk tales. It's often very hard work finding a

treasure, because X never marks the spot. Then he is called away from his teaching to go and find a treasure. He finds himself in Venice in an ancient church that has been converted into a library. They are looking for the entrance to the catacombs under the church, but don't have much success until he goes up to the balcony and gets a bird's eye view of the floor. There, set in the floor, much to his surprise, is a giant X marking the spot they are looking for. He makes the comment, "I guess X does mark the spot!"

Many people today are looking for treasure too, the kind of treasure that Jesus alludes to in the Gospel today. The search for the abundant life will take you to the X, to the cross. There it is that the Shepherd dies for the sheep. But the search doesn't end there. On Friday, our VBS lessons will take us to one more place, to a garden cemetery and an empty grave. It's a grave where death died and hope was resurrected. If you are looking for treasure, you have to follow the shepherd to the cross, and to the empty tomb, to forgiveness and life. "Lord, to whom shall we go, You have the words of eternal life." Peter spoke those words in the midst of a time when many of Jesus' disciples stopped following Him because they didn't like what they were hearing. It was that same conviction that brought Peter back to Jesus after he had denied Jesus three times. Peter knew in his heart that there was only one place he could go with his sin and guilt ... back to the Shepherd.