

John 10:22-30

April 17, 2016

“Who Needs a Shepherd?”

- most children, when they reach that certain age will be sure to tell you, “I don’t need a babysitter”
- they may also say things like “I don’t want to stay at Grandma’s house ... she doesn’t let us do anything fun”
  - which actually means, she doesn’t let me get into stuff
- around the same time, they want to go places by themselves,
  - ... on the bus
  - no ride from dad
  - no hovering from mom
  - no helicopter parenting
    - I’m old enough to look after myself
    - it’s easy ... well maybe for them, but not for mom and dad
- even when your kids get grown up, it’s hard to let go
  - yes, they are adults
    - and yes, they can look after themselves and find their way home again
  - but it’s a parent’s job to worry ... and stew, and fret and lose sleep ... you know how it goes
    - it’s part of the job description
- there’s this thirst in them to be independent, to find their way
  - to make their own mistakes and learn from them along the way
    - and for the most part, that’s a good thing
- there’s a couple of things that they need to know before you send them off into the world

-it is spiritually dangerous out there, and you need to be prepared  
and you need to know where to go for help

-we hear this talk about Jesus the Good Shepherd today, and we get  
this warm fuzzy feeling ... and most of Psalm 23 doesn't help  
-green pastures ... still waters ... not a want or a care in the world

-you almost miss the valley ... the deep, dark valley ... death valley  
-it is spiritually dangerous out there

-you have to imagine sheep grazing in less than ideal conditions

-you're out on the moors ... easy to lose your way

-it's wild country, filled with hungry predators

-it is a dangerous place to be

-Luther knew it

-if you knew how many fiery darts the devil had aimed at you,  
you would run to the sacrament every chance you had

-Paul knew it too ... consider our Acts lesson this morning

-Paul was in the midst of a journey back to Jerusalem and he made a  
quick side trip stop near Ephesus so that he could meet with the  
elders of the church there

-God had blessed his ministry and his mission travels and the  
church in Ephesus had grown and prospered

-Paul loved the people there dearly, and they loved him

-as he stopped in Miletus, just south of Ephesus, he sent for  
the elders of the church to come down and meet with  
him

- he was travelling to Jerusalem to bring a relief offering to the Christians there and did not want to be delayed unnecessarily
- but he knew that it was important to see them once more
  
- what did he know about the future of the church in Ephesus?
  - he told them that savage wolves would come in among them and would not spare the flock
  - men would arise and distort the truth and try to draw away disciples after them
    - they needed to be on your guard
    - they needed to help the weak and look after one another
  
- how did he know that?
  - prophetic vision ... perhaps
    - the Holy Spirit had warned Paul that prison and hardship were in his future
  - he also knew that virtually everywhere he went with the Gospel, he encountered two groups of people
    - there were those who responded in faith
    - there were those who stood in ever growing opposition to Christ and his church
  
- his words to the elders in Ephesus are clear
  - keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers
  - this is a hostile world, filled with many spiritual dangers and temptations
    - bad theology is right outside the door
      - bad theology lurks even in our sinful nature
        - it grows in our hearts and constantly tries to take over

- false doctrine and false teaching were always crouching at the door, ready to pounce if the church let its guard down
  - even Peter was guilty of it when he came to Antioch
- we learn from Galatians 2 that even Peter gave in to the temptation to give up the freedom we have in the Gospel
  - he gave in to those who wanted to inflict OT Jewish ceremonies on the church in Antioch

*When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.*

- it didn't take much and it didn't take long for the core truth of salvation by grace through faith to get trampled
- what was at stake there in Antioch was not a little thing
  - it went to the heart and core of the Gospel and the freedom we have in Christ
- you see, the devil is never content to leave a living church alone
  - he will try and do whatever he can to disrupt and destroy the church of Christ
    - he doesn't care much about dead and dying ones, but if a church is trying to be serious about sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the world, the devil will try and interfere
  - he prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour

- if we get too self-reliant or too sure of ourselves ...
  - if we get self confident and smug, disaster isn't far away
  - things in the church, and in life, can change very quickly
  
- God's church throughout the generations has faced challenges
  - some are tempted to serve self only
    - they build walls to insulate themselves from the world
  - some have fallen victim to bad theology, or even worse ... no theology
  - others have given in to the insidious temptations to follow the ways of the world
  
- they try to do the inclusive thing where all faiths lead to the same God
- or they do the sexual freedom thing and abandon and ignore what God says about His design for marriage and the family
  
- what happened to the importance of preserving and proclaiming the good news of the Gospel of forgiveness through Jesus' suffering and death and resurrection?
  - the root of the problem is very simple ... when a church or a church body abandons the Word of God and turns its back on the Good Shepherd, you have abandoned your mission and your first love
  
- if you have given up on making a spiritual and eternal difference in peoples' lives, then any noble cause can become your mission
  
- sometimes what befalls a church is beyond its doors
  - prairie towns dry up and disappear, their churches with them
  - neighbourhoods change and if the church in that place doesn't adjust to its changing neighbourhood, it won't survive

- even then, the most important things don't change
  - we preach Christ crucified and risen again for the forgiveness of sins
  - the Spirit continues to work in the hearts and lives of his people
- God's people in every age need to have an outward focus
  - they are called to be "a light in the darkness of the surrounding community"
  - they look for ways of ministering to the needs of those without Christ, who are without a hope, and without a future
  - and they need to pray that the Holy Spirit would continue to maintain them in the one true faith
- on Holy Thursday, Jesus would pray for the disciples ... I have lost none of those you gave me
  - here he promises "never shall they perish never"
    - in Greek you can do that ... a double negative is an extra strong negative
- remember the story of the miracle pilot, "Sully" Sullivan who had to land his damaged plane in the Hudson River after bird strikes stalled both engines just after take off?
- imagine the thankful relief when it was over that he had lost none of his precious passengers
  - they did a head count of all the survivors, and everyone made it!
    - none were lost ...
- 40 days after Easter, Ascension day comes up on the calendar
  - Jesus will leave his disciples and they will be in harm's way
    - but he will not leave them helpless ... or defenceless
      - he will send his Holy Spirit who will keep them safe
      - he will come back again to bring them all safely home
    - and he will continue to be their Good Shepherd

- there's a similar message in our Revelation 7 lesson today
  - what do you know about those who are robed in white?
  - who are they?
  
- they are the ones who have come out of the great tribulation
  - they have been through the valley of the shadow of death, and now they have come to dwell in the house of the Lord forever
  
- they are the ones made clean in the blood of the Lamb
  - they have been through great trials and suffering ... tribulation
    - they have been hungry, thirsty
    - they have been beaten and imprisoned and left for dead
  - in life, they have been surrounded by enemies on every side
  - in danger, in peril, struggling in the wilderness
  
- but now they are safe ... safe in the arms of Jesus
  - they have come through the valley of the shadow of death and will dwell in the house of the Lord forever
  
- it truly is a jungle down here, filled with many dangers, toils and snares
  - but God in his grace keeps us safe
  - and God in his grace will lead us home
  
- our good news today is clear ... there is a way to stay safe
  - here on earth God's children are numbered and counted ...  
carefully kept track of  
... they are marked by the blood of the Lamb and God's eye  
is on them
  - we, who are still in harm's way are numbered and counted
  - kept safe until the day the Lord will call us home

- what you need to see is this ... in the midst of all that assails us, the only safe place there is, is to always be near the Shepherd
- even my dog knows that ... when there's a storm outside ... when there are strange noises happening, she knows that curiosity is her worst enemy
- in those times, there is only one safe place ... right beside you
  
- if we live in daily repentance and faith
- if we die to sin and rise to new life
- if we stay close to the shepherd ... we are kept safe unto eternal life
  
- we are and will be always safe in the arms of the Good Shepherd
- they shall never perish
- no one can snatch them out of my hand
  
- you see, we have an eternal inheritance kept in heaven where there is no rust, no moths, no thieves to break in and steal
  
- do you doubt that?
- do you doubt the power of God or the love of God?
- consider who this Good Shepherd is
- he is strong and powerful
- he is able to leap tall buildings in a single bound ... no, that's someone else
- Jesus is better than the Man of Steel
- he is able to fight off every enemy
- he is able to break the power of death
- stay near him!
- be in the Word
- the word of God's grace is what can bind us up and bring us to



eternal life

- the blood of the Lamb is what can cleanse us from every sin
- God will spread his tent over us
- the Lamb is our shepherd and he will lead us to springs of living water

-what you need to see is this ...

- in the midst of the awesomeness of God and the power of God, you need to see the love and grace of God who invites us to draw near and who promises to shelter us under his almighty power

-we have access ... but on God's terms

- no access apart from grace
- no access apart from sacrifice
- no access apart from the Good Shepherd who came to lead his sheep home

-yes, it is a dangerous world for the sheep of the Good Shepherd

- but greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world
- the safest place is with the Shepherd