

**Myers Park Presbyterian Church**

**November 30, 2014**

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*Shepherd*

**Psalm 23**

**John 10:11-18**

During 2014, the other clergy and I have been preaching on one word a week from the Bible. In this season of Advent, we are preaching on titles that are ascribed to Jesus. In each title we find something of his character and nature. Today the word is “*Shepherd*.”

**Psalm 23**

<sup>1</sup>*The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.*

<sup>2</sup>*He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.*

<sup>3</sup>*He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*

<sup>4</sup>*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*

<sup>5</sup>*Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.*

<sup>6</sup>*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.*

**John 10:11-18**

<sup>11</sup>*“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*

<sup>12</sup>*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. <sup>13</sup>The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. <sup>14</sup>I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, <sup>15</sup>just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup>I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. <sup>17</sup>For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. <sup>18</sup>No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”*

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Dr. Tim Laniak, professor of Old Testament at Gordon- Conwell Theological Seminary here in Charlotte wrote a book entitled, *While Shepherds Watch Their Flocks* (Shepherd Leader Publications, 2007). It's a daily devotional based on leadership principles learned from *shepherds*. Tim spent a lot of time with *shepherds* in the Middle-East and in conducting his research; he asked the question, "What does it take to be a shepherd?" He soon discovered that no one had a formal curriculum. A Jordanian Bedouin had an interesting response, "What really matters is that you have the heart for it." (p. 29)

Jesus calls himself the "good shepherd." He identifies with the person and work of a *shepherd*. He has a heart for it. It suits him. So what does it take to be a "good shepherd?"

**Every good shepherd leads the flock to places of nourishment.** David, the greatest king Israel ever knew was first a *shepherd*. In the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm he writes,

*'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want  
He makes me lie down in green pastures;'* (Psalm 23:1)

"Green pastures" are places of nourishment.

There are an estimated 270 plants and shrubs that grow across the Arab desert lands. The sheep are prone to eat them all, but some of those are poisonous plants and most of them have empty calories for nutrition. The sheep will eat the weeds and trash and die of malnutrition.

Isaiah writes;

*All we like sheep have gone astray;  
we have all turned to our own way,  
and the Lord has laid on him the  
iniquity of us all.* (Isaiah 53:6)

Are we not inclined to wander off; to feed on the trash and on things with empty calories?  
*We need a shepherd.*

Jesus sees something in himself that he saw in a "good shepherd." **Every good shepherd protects the flock from danger.**

There are a vast variety of ills and dangers that face the sheep. There are all kinds of risks and afflictions. Laniak quotes a source that states,

*... (sheep) are susceptible to braxy, pulpy kidney, staggers, pneumonia,  
pasturella, twin lamb disease, cancer, hypothermia, maggots, scab, scrapie,*

*foxes, crows and dogs. They push their heads through fences and get stuck. They climb trees to get foliage and get hung up by their horns or legs. They fall down banks, get bitten by snakes and stung by wasps. They tumble into ponds and streams. They gorge themselves on fallen ash, roll over on their backs and blow up like balloons. They poison themselves on ragwort. They starve, freeze, get depressed and fall ill – but a good shepherd can counter every affliction. (Laniak, p. 65)*

If Jesus sees himself as a good *shepherd*, he is likely to see us as sheep facing a vast variety of ills and dangers in life. People get stuck in debt, in compulsive behaviors, desperate feelings, illness, toxic relationships, lies, secrets and passions, suffering the consequences of their choices.

David writes,

*<sup>4</sup>Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. (Psalm 23:4a)*

The evil is still there. The *shepherd* doesn't take away the valley, he protects the sheep as they go through it. We need *a shepherd*.

In protecting the sheep, **every good shepherd has a “rod” and a “staff.”** Sheep have no sharp teeth or claws. They have no defense mechanism except to huddle together. They can only see 10-15 feet. They are passive and dependent and they suffer in silence. That's not how most of us see ourselves, but it may be how Jesus sees us. There are times all of us may feel defenseless. There are times when all of us face the wolves. Each wolf has a different face.

David writes;

*‘...your rod and your staff, they comfort me.’  
(Ps. 23:4b)*

The *staff* is for protection, used to rescue the sheep from harm's way. The large hook is used to pull away the briars, to stabilize the sheep and to move them back to safety. The *rod* is more aggressive, more proactive. It doesn't wait for the sheep to get into trouble. It goes after the wolves and after the thieves. So, if Jesus is the “good shepherd,” is there a *rod* and a *staff* of God at work in this world today?

The atheist, the agnostic, the skeptic, the marginal and even the devout of every religion will, at some point, come to ask this question; “*Is God active in the world?*” The Jewish

people certainly asked this question during the horrifying experience of the holocaust. Is there a rod and staff of God pulling us away from danger and driving off the wolves?

To be honest, at times, it seems as if the answer is “No.” The wolves win and innocent people suffer. Many people today may be asking, “Where is the rod and staff of God?” Sheep must trust the shepherd. *We all need a shepherd.*”

**Every good shepherd has compassion for the sheep.** When Jesus fed the 5,000 with a few loaves of bread and fish, Mark tells us;

*As he went ashore, (Jesus) saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he began to teach them many things. (Mark 6:34)*

He had *compassion* for them. There’s something – the compassion of Christ. How do you think that might change the world? How badly do we sheep need it?

Compassion drives you to get involved. You can’t stay detached. The sheep matter too much – all of them. Isn’t that what Jesus told the Pharisees?

*‘Which among you have a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after that one that is lost until he finds it?’ (Luke 15:4)*

If the Church were to reflect the very nature of Christ, we would be full of his compassion for all people. It would never, under any circumstances, be acceptable for even one to be lost. It matters too much. They matter too much. You matter too much. We have to get involved. We can’t stay detached. The world needs the compassion of Jesus. The Church needs it. We all *need a shepherd.*

It’s just interesting that Jesus chooses this title for himself – one among many. It tells us a lot about who he is, about his nature and character, about his profound love for all of us

Advent is the season of anticipation, not for Christmas but for Jesus’ coming again. It’s a time not to look back, but to look ahead, longing for this “good shepherd.”

*For all we like sheep have gone astray;  
we have all turned to our own way. (Isaiah 53:6)*

Come, Lord Jesus! (Rev. 22:20b)

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.  
Congregation. **Amen**