

We Are Safe in the Arms of Jesus

John 10:11-18

Good Shepherd Sunday

April 22, 2018

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Jesus the Good Shepherd is a popular picture around the world. In fact, you can't enter many Christian churches where you will not find a picture of Jesus portrayed as the shepherd of the sheep. One of the more famous portrayals of our Good Shepherd is the picture of Jesus holding a lamb in his arms.

What makes this picture so popular? I'm sure it has something to do with the message. We are that lamb, and we are being held by Jesus. It is a picture of safety and peace. It reminds us that everything is going to be o.k. because Jesus is keeping us safe in his arms.

Jesus today tells us that picture is true. He really is our Good Shepherd and he really is taking care of us. Jesus tells us to keep our focus on him when we are looking for relief and safety. That isn't always so easy for us to do. It isn't easy feeling safe when danger is all around us. But, despite the danger we are not alone because despite what we might perceive, the truth will always remain the same: **we are safe in the arms of Jesus.**

The picture of Jesus keeping us safe as our Good Shepherd is traditionally celebrated during the Easter season. However, Jesus gave us this picture six months before his suffering and death. What this tells us is that our salvation was never in doubt. Jesus knew that he couldn't be The Good Shepherd if he didn't rise again. Yet, he tells us that we have nothing to worry about because he is our Good Shepherd. How was Jesus so confident that he wouldn't fail?

He tells us: 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.*"

Jesus had power that no one else had because his is God's Son. He had the power to give up his life and to take it back. When we look at Jesus on Maundy Thursday when he is betrayed and arrested. When we look at Jesus being nailed to a cross on Good Friday. We can't stress enough that Jesus isn't being forced to do anything. His life wasn't taken from him. He died according to his will. He gave up his spirit only after he had finished the work of saving us. Jesus knew he had the power to do this and so he knew that what he said here was true.

This helps us appreciate the picture of Jesus holding a lamb even more. We see this picture and know that he is the only one who can hold us and keep us truly safe in this world. When we were kids we wanted to be held by our parents for the same reason, but our parents were not always able to keep us safe. But, with Jesus our Good Shepherd we know he can keep us safe because he saved us from our sins by giving up and taking back his life for us, so we could live with him in heaven.

But why? God has the power to save but he didn't need to save us. Saving or us or not saving us, wouldn't change anything about our God. He doesn't gain anymore glory than he already has. He doesn't gain any attributes or wealth by our being saved. What is God's motivation?

Shouldn't Jesus have acted like the "hired hand" that he talks about in his sermon? Doesn't the hired hand act rationally here? He is certainly worth more than the sheep. How much more is Jesus worth than us?

Yet, Jesus gives up his life and takes it up again, so we could live eternally in heaven and not die eternally in hell. He suffers hell to keep us from the punishment we deserve for no other reason than love. Our God just simply loves us more than we can imagine.

Listen to your Good Shepherd: ¹¹ *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.* ¹² *The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own 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—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.*

Notice Jesus wants us to focus on him alone. He is telling you, “*Don’t look around. Don’t get distracted. You are not going to find anything or anyone like me, who loves you and can protect you the way that I do.*”

Why doesn’t he want us to be distracted? Because when we are we lose focus of the truth. Distractions can be our biggest downfall and it is easy for us to do. We look at the world around us and compare it to what our Savior tells us. What distracts us is that what we experience in this sinful world isn’t lining up with what Jesus says is happening.

When our lives don’t appear to match God’s promises we react and start using a four letter “f” word, that tears our relationship with God into pieces. It is an awful word that shouldn’t be said when we are talking about the promises God gives us. The word is “feel.”

When we get distracted we start to “feel” that something else is happening than what our Good Shepherd has promised. I “feel” that God’s plan for me is going off course and I have to help myself by doing things my way. I “feel” God is punishing me for my sins and I need to show him that I am truly sorry. I “feel” that God doesn’t love me because my life is hard and tragic and not going the way it should.

It is during these distracted moments when we our “feelings” distort the reality of what God is really doing. We look at that picture of Jesus holding us as his sheep and actually “feel” that the lamb isn’t me but someone else or worse, that Jesus isn’t holding anyone at all.

The problem with our feelings is that they fell at the Fall. Our feelings therefore are not reliable but stained with sin and distrust and misunderstanding. Too often we pattern our lives around what we “feel” is happening to us and therefore cause our own spiritual demise. The only way to find the truth is to look at the reality that is found in Jesus so that we can “know” what is really happening.

Jesus tells us that “He is The Good Shepherd”. Why? He laid down his life for us his sheep. He not only loves us but he is here to help us and more importantly he is the only one who can help us.

If you want to know for certain that God really does love you. Look at Jesus and you will see clearly. Jesus tells us that he knows us and still laid down his life for us. He knows you which means he knows everything you ever did. He knows why he shouldn’t save you. He knows why he should have left you to fight the wolves of hell on your own. And despite your sinfulness, he died for you and rose for you anyways. What love.

Jesus is our Good Shepherd. Not “good” in the sense that a piece of cake tastes “good,” or that a student who receives a 92% on a test is doing “good” work. Jesus is, instead, “excellent,” “the very best,” with respect to both his personal character and the work that he does. Jesus is, after all, the only one “good” enough to merit our salvation by appeasing God the Father who demands perfection.

Jesus our Good Shepherd is our reality. He is our Savior from sin. He is the one who is with us always. He is the one ruling all things for our good. He is the one who is preparing a place for you in heaven. He is the one holding you in his arms so that nothing can separate you from his love. He is the one who has made you one of his sheep. No matter what happens to you bodily on this side of eternity, it can never change what is true for your spiritually because Jesus is your Good Shepherd and he is watching over you and delivering you from evil.

Our Shepherd has given you a place of green pastures and quiet waters in heaven. But, we are not there yet, which means, Jesus words are still true: 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.***

There are still more sheep left to be gathered. There are still more who “feel” God doesn’t love them. Go and show them the reality of God’s love. He died for them too because he loves them also. Show them their Good Shepherd so that they can know that they too are safe in his arms. Amen.