

Easter 4C, 2010 (Good Shepherd)

Text: John 10:22-30

Title: It's dangerous to be a Sheep

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It's dangerous to be a sheep these days. There is danger all around you. Wolves threaten to devour you. Poachers threaten to carry you off. There are steep cliffs and rocky paths. At times the food and water are in short supply. Disease and injuries are always a threat. It's dangerous to be a sheep.

But thankfully, you do not face these dangers alone. You belong to a shepherd. You belong to a shepherd who knows you and cares for you. You belong to a shepherd who gives you everything you need, even eternal life. You belong to a shepherd who leads you and guides.

Your shepherd leads you beside the still waters of Holy Baptism. There you are refreshed and reborn and washed clean.

Your shepherd teaches you His ways, and leads you in paths of His righteousness. He speaks to you through the Holy Scriptures, showing you the right path that He has laid out for you.

Your shepherd is with you even in the shadow of death itself. His rod and His staff comfort you. His is there rod to protect you from your enemies, driving off the wolf and the bear. His staff is there to draw you in, if you should wander off.

Your shepherd feeds you at His own table. He prepares it for you, even in the presence of your enemies.

Your shepherd anoints your head with oil, the sweet fragrance and perfume of the Holy Spirit.

Your shepherd fills your cup to overflowing, with all that you need and more.

Your shepherd will fill your life with His goodness and mercy.

Your shepherd will lead you safely home, and you will dwell in His house forever. There you will be safe from all the dangers around you.

In His house you will be before His throne and serve Him day and night. You will hunger no more, neither shall you thirst. The sun shall not strike you, nor any scorching heat, for the Lamb will be your shepherd, and He will guide you to springs of living water, and He will wipe away every tear from your eye.

No one will be able to snatch you out of your shepherd's hand. He has you in His care.

Death will not be able to snatch you out of your shepherd's hand, for He is risen from the dead, and has conquered death. When you die, it will not be the end for you, but death will actually bring you closer to your shepherd.

Satan will not be able to snatch you out of your shepherd's hand, for He has withstood the temptations of Satan, cast out demons, and overthrown His kingdom.

Sin will not be able to snatch you out of your shepherd's hand, because He has taken your sin upon Himself, and it hangs dead with Him on the cross.

Nothing, no one, will be able to snatch you out of your shepherd's hand.

It's dangerous to be a sheep these days. This world is full of peril and temptation. So you are best off following your shepherd.

Jesus says, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."

To be a sheep means to listen and to follow.

That's hard for sheep like us. We want to talk, not listen, and we want to lead, not follow.

But, as any parent will tell you, you can't talk and listen at the same time. It just doesn't work. We spend so much time talking about what we think, telling God what He should do and how He should act, that we have a hard time just listening to Jesus, and hearing what He has to say.

Jesus is still speaking to us. Too often we've already decided what we want to hear, and so we practice selective hearing. We listen to the parts we like, and we ignore the parts we don't like, or don't fit with our picture of Jesus.

We like the parts about Jesus feeding us and taking care of us, but not the parts where He tells us how to live.

Our picture of Jesus the Good Shepherd is of a good looking, middle-aged man, sitting in the middle of a beautiful green field, with fluffy white lambs prancing all around them. One might stub his toe, and so Jesus runs to pick it up and cuddle with it for awhile.

Instead, the picture Scripture gives us is not lambs merrily frolicking, but of a path, a journey. We don't stay long to play, but we are on the move and Jesus is leading.

You are a sheep, and that means that you listen and follow the shepherd.

Jesus, the shepherd, knows the terrain. He knows where the green pastures are and where the living water flows. He knows where the wolves hide out and where the path gets rough. He's been this way Himself, many times. So listen to Him, follow Him.

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, leads the way. You, as sheep, follow along behind. Jesus does not merely give you a map and tell you to find the way, but He goes first. Jesus became human, was born, lived and died, just like you.

As Jesus does this, He gives you eternal life, and you will never perish, just like Him.

Today we rejoice with five of our fellow sheep. The Good Shepherd has led them beside the still waters of Holy Baptism, He has led them in the paths of righteousness, and they will join us at the table prepared for us.

As they come forward today, they are saying, this is my flock, Jesus is my shepherd, and by His grace I will follow where He leads.

They are placing themselves under Jesus' care and asking Him to strengthen them by His Holy Spirit for the journey that lies ahead.

It's dangerous to be a sheep these days, and so these, your brothers and sisters in Christ, will come forward and pray for the Lord to strengthen them, protect them, and guide them, to confirm them in this faith that has been given to them, that they will receive the shepherd's gift of eternal life and dwell in His house forever.

One final note. Jesus is not the only shepherd you have. The word "pastor" is Latin for shepherd. And in Spanish, too. When I told some of my Mexican friends that I was studying to be a pastor, they laughed at me and asked, "Where are the sheep?"

But "shepherd" is a good description for what a pastor does. When St. Paul left the pastors in Ephesus, he said to them, "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my own departure, fierce wolves will come in and among you, not sparing the flock."

It's dangerous to be a sheep these days. Wolves are all around you. And not just in person- now you can see wolves on TV, read wolves in the bookstore, find wolves on the internet. Just about anywhere you look you will find wolves.

So the Good Shepherd has given you your own shepherd to care for you here in this place- to feed you, to lead you and to warn you of danger. You still listen for the Good Shepherd's voice. If you hear Him in what your pastor is saying, then listen and follow. If not, then find a new pastor.

It's dangerous to be a sheep these days. Threats and peril are around you on every side. You have a pastor to teach you, to feed you, and help you to follow the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd knows you, He gives you eternal life, and no one can ever snatch you out of His hand.