

Fourth Sunday after Easter
April 25, 2021

We will not get out of this life alive. We know that. So far, it's one hundred percent. Even Jesus, God in the flesh, died. But there is a longing for life; for eternal life. Yes, we want to live, but within us is a desire greater than just living life. The animals will move to sustain life, but they do not have a desire for a better life. That *something* within us causes us to be constantly on the move. The unbelievers of the world would call that a migratory herd instinct. An instinct directs, it does not call you to be something else. This excuse for unbelievers masks what is really in us that desires the something which we do not have.

The first level of sin is something with which we are all familiar. We see it most clearly when one of the ways of God's creation is perverted to the absurd. I do not have, so I take, I steal. I want what another has and I figure out a way to take it as mine. The rampant and heightened promotion of self-seeking for pleasure in our culture is at the point of the absurd. We see it all around us, we often call it entertainment. My friends, these are really distractions from what is really going on. There is a rebellion against the One who created the order for all things. Yes, the infection is in us.

The Good Shepherd pours oil on our head. We may not understand this, but those who raise sheep do. In a world filled with parasites, the oil keeps the parasites from blinding the sheep and infecting their ears. The Lord anoints your head with the heavenly purpose and power so that your eyes see and your ears hear.

"He who has ears, let him hear."

If you know that you will not get out of this life alive, what is it you want. We know in our youth-crazed society, with its constant tugs at seeking to pretend that we are not aging, there is the reality which creeps in. The young get older and we are startled by the reality of aging. But, we who hear the Gospel know that though we die, yet shall we live.

Why this obsession with death? People are perplexed by the God who dies. Why does Jesus need to die? He, Jesus, did not need to die. He laid down His life for the sheep. It was for us that He died. But, why?

If grace is simply a matter of letting us off the hook for the rebellion of this age, why didn't God just let us off of the hook? If just keeping the law would make God happy, why is it that we cannot keep the law? But, can we not see the reality of this? If all the unrepentant people go into eternity as they are, then eternity will be just like this earth. Even the best of us would make heaven into a hell. I do not know about you, but I say, "No, thank you!" There is, I believe, a God-given yearning for a place where people actually and always behave as they ought to behave and everyone truly loves everyone else for no other reason than that this is the way it is supposed to be. We are gathered here together and I cannot help but believe that you also long for a non-confrontational existence where all do their part. We are to practice, to the best of our ability, what heaven is going to be like. But, even in the best of earthly fellowships, sin noses its way in. Friends, this is the goal of every fellowship: that we live in harmony for the sake of the Good News of salvation which is given to us as the Good Shepherd leads us through the valley of this shadow of death which surrounds us. That shadow is sometimes us standing in the way of the Light of the World, our Good Shepherd, Jesus.

We must be led. A pastor comes and he or she is an under-shepherd, listening to the Good Shepherd, who must lead the way. Only the Lord knows the travails that will come. You see, the Valley of the Shadow of Death is a literal place, which is a desert path that leads from

Jericho to Jerusalem, There is no water along the way, but the valley, or the Wadi as the natives call it, has many branches that shoot off from the main path. There is just enough sustenance for the sheep to make it to the Oasis. If they wander, even slightly, off of the path, they will not make it even to the halfway point. The Good Shepherd keeps His sheep on the path. We all, like sheep, want to wander off of the narrow path which leads to eternal life.

The sheep know the Good Shepherd's voice. If I come preaching a gospel other than the one which has already been preached, the sheep know that something is not right. I preach nothing new to you, but I constantly am called to preach the Good News of salvation which is in Christ. You know the truth when you meet Him.

This is why the world cannot be saved. It is not on the path which leads to salvation, Each does what is right in their own mind. But the Good Shepherd leads on so that we who know sin, may know the greater portion, which is the eternal life for which we have been called through the waters of our baptism. We are initially refreshed to make the arduous journey through this life. Along the way, the Lord stops us to refresh our souls.

Do not fear evil. Yes, it is all around us, but evil has lost its sting. The sting of sin is death, but the victory has already been won through the work of the Good Shepherd.

You will make it if you keep your eyes upon Jesus. Along the way are the Oasis which He provides. He gives you just enough and not too much in order to continue the journey. "My cup overflows." Sheep, when thirsty, if allowed, will drink themselves to death. The Good Shepherd knows that you need enough to revive your soul, but that too much will send you right back into the rebellion of this age. "Lord, why don't you . . ." is the plea for more. The Lord gives just enough. No place in this age is the destination. The destination is eternity with the Lord.

We are called to live in the goodness and mercy of the Good Shepherd. As He leads us, He brings us to the cross. Yes, that is the destination of this journey of life. We must die to sin, death, and the devil in order to be resurrected with Him to have a life like His. Is there no other way? The way of the cross is what He has established. To suppose another way is to put your self in the way of the Lord. The Good Shepherd knows all that is needed. Be content in Him and abide in His way of life.

Do good to those in need, for this is justice. Do good to the undeserving, for this is grace. You and I do not know what the Lord will do with our actions, but the servant who is obedient to the Father will accomplish His will on earth as it shall be done in heaven. There can be no condemnation for those who intentionally seek to do the will of our Heavenly Father. Therefore, we are to have boldness in faith, standing firm upon the solid rock of Jesus, our Good Shepherd. He who knew us before the foundation of the earth has provided the way for all of the days of our life.

Believe that the Good Shepherd is leading You. Know that the One who laid down His earthly life, and through laying it down built the narrow road which leads to eternal life, knows all that is needed. He is making of you what He is making of You, but you know that this means that by being conformed to His image, You have been prepared to become a child of the Heavenly Father. All who have learned heavenly obedience abide in our God, just as He abides in us with His Holy Spirit.

All we need to know is that our good and gracious God, who has revealed Himself as the Good Shepherd will lead us all the days of our life. Go into the world refreshed and let the light of Christ who abides in you, shine for all of your neighbors in the coming week. Amen.