

The Lord Is My Shepherd John 10:22-30

It was winter, and in Jerusalem there was a great Jewish Feast of the Dedication. This Feast is called now Hanukkah, which falls near Christmastime. Jesus was walking in the temple in Solomon's porch. The Jews who were gathered around him approached Jesus and asked, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus responded, "I already did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep." This is the content of the discourse between Jesus and the Jews in today's scripture lesson.

There were three kinds of people among the followers of Jesus: hearers, tasters, and believers, just as there are three ways to become the Lord's sheep. Let me talk first, about three kinds of people among the followers of Jesus: the hearers, tasters, and believers.

Of course the three kinds of people, the hearers, tasters and believers, were all hearers but some of them came just to hear Jesus' sayings. These specific people, the hearers, were mostly Pharisees, lawyers and doctors who were trying to trap Jesus. They were there to hear Jesus' sayings and to find clues in order to have a basis for accusing him. They heard Jesus' sayings but didn't understand him. Because they didn't understand, in verse 31, it reads, "Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him." These hearers are the first group among the followers of Jesus.

The second group of the followers of Jesus was the "tasters." These had followed Jesus from here to there to seek Jesus from Galilee to Capernaum, Capernaum to Tiberias. When they found Jesus on the side of a lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" Jesus told them, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill." They knew who Jesus was by tasting the bread but didn't believe in him yet.

Knowing God is not equivalent to believing in God. And, knowing God is not enough. The scripture says, "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened." (Romans 1:21) Knowing God in one hand, they exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served created things rather than the creator – who is forever praised. Some church attendants are tasters of Jesus. Once I had a vacation planned one summer, and one of my previous parishioners approached me after the service when she heard that I would be going on vacation the following week. She handed me a card in which she wrote, "Pastor, on your vacation, have some tasty meals with your family and prepare for us a tasty sermon." I still remember this phrase, "Tasty sermon." Whenever I prepare my sermons, I worry whether it is a "tasty sermon" or "nutritious sermon."

Now, lastly there were believers of Jesus among the followers and hearers of Jesus. They knew Jesus by listening to his voice, and so trusted and belonged to Jesus. They were the sheep of the Lord, their shepherd. They followed Jesus because he is their shepherd. They

were listeners of Jesus. The sheep that belong to the Lord's flock are characterized by obedience, recognition of the shepherd, and allegiance to him.

These listeners, believer of Jesus, Jesus called "my sheep." Jesus said, "They know me and I know them that they belong to me." They are guaranteed eternal life and permanent protection. All the resources of God are committed to their preservation. Eternal life is given to them, not earned by them, and they themselves are given to Christ by the Father. Christ promises his personal protection to the sheep that the Father has given him. "No one can snatch them out of my hand."

Many times in the Bible, the people of God are referred to as sheep. A few of the more notable passages that come to mind are the 23rd Psalm, Isaiah 53: 6 and John 10. Isaiah reminds us, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord had laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:6)

Psalm 23 is the favorite psalm of many people. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." That is absolute trust. People read it at funerals, yet it isn't about death. Instead, it is an invitation to a way of life. It is a confident statement that it is possible to live in the unceasing care of a relentlessly attentive and gracious God. Can you make this confident statement? Does it describe your way of life? Or, do you live worried and weighed, dulled to the daily presence of the Shepherd?

Today's sermon title is, "The Lord Is My Shepherd."

Do you know very much about sheep? We know very much about our pets, dogs and cats. Dog loves to follow his host family while cats love to remain in the house when his host family is gone. But, nobody wants to keep sheep as pets. We don't know much about sheep. A grown female sheep is called a ewe. A grown male sheep is called a ram. Baby sheep are called lambs.

A lamb can find its mother by the sound of her bleat. Every sheep looks different, and even though we humans sometimes can't tell them apart, the sheep can. Sheep and lamb are mentioned about 400 times in the Bible.

The Children of God are referred to as sheep throughout the Bible. Why? For one thing, raising sheep has been an important way for people to make a living for thousands of years. People in Bible times knew a lot about sheep, so they were a good object to use in teaching. Another reason is because we humans have so much in common with sheep. The Bible and Jesus used the metaphor of sheep of the shepherd for the people of God.

For example, sheep aren't very smart, and they are stubborn. They are not smartest animals in the world. As a result, they are constantly getting into terrible situations. If a sheep tries to go through a hole in the fence, and the hole is too small, he will just keep on trying to go forward instead of backing out. We keep on doing the same things over and over and expect different results. Sheep can't see far and only see things nearby. We don't see far and the whole picture of God's deliverance for us. Unfortunately, even after

a person is saved, there is still a definite lack of understanding among most of the Lord's sheep.

Sheep are followers. If one sheep moves, the others will follow, even though it may not be a good decision. If the lead sheep jumps over a cliff, the others are likely to follow. Sometime we are followers, too. It seems to me that most women are very sensitive about conventional fashion. When you go to a shopping mall, you will see many clothes on sale. The items on sale tend to be "last season's" styles, items which people are less tempted to buy because most people want the latest fashion. We follow what other people are doing, even though it may be harmful to us. Romans 12: 2 says, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

Sheep sometimes wander. They graze without paying attention to where they are going. They may be unable to find their way home even when it's within sight. If a sheep wanders off from the rest of the herd, it will have a hard, if not impossible time finding its way back. They have no sense of direction. So it is with those outside the Lord, there is simply no sense of spiritual direction in their lives. They cannot find their way to the Lord by themselves. We sometimes wander too. We stray away from what God has thought us to do. Like the sheep, we sometimes can't find the way home even when it is in plain sight.

Sheep are powerless and defenseless. By their very nature, sheep need a shepherd, and I suppose this is another reason why the figure of sheep is used to describe the people of God. In John 10, the metaphor of the Shepherd is used for Jesus. He lays down his life for the sheep. When he sees the wolf coming, the good shepherd defeats the wolf and protects the sheep. But, as for a hired man who does not own the sheep, when he sees the wolf coming he abandons the sheep and runs away. The good shepherd does everything in his power to find the sheep, and when he does, he returns home rejoicing that he has recovered that sheep that was missing. The Shepherd seeks His sheep.

The good shepherd knows the sheep individually, just as the Father knows his children. Jesus said, "No one takes it from me, but I lay down my life only to take it up again." "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord." To the shepherd, there are no big sheep and little sheep. Every sheep he has is precious in his eyes. So it is with the Lord. He loves all his sheep equally. All are precious in His sight. Fortunately for the sheep, the shepherd is there to rescue them and bring them home to the sheep fold.

There are three ways to become the Lord's sheep. It is very simple to become a sheep of the Lord. Listen to the shepherd's calling and follow his leadership. The sheep that belong to the Lord's flock are characterized by obedience, recognition of the shepherd, and allegiance to him. Jesus is that Shepherd. Trust in Him and obey Him and follow Him. Then, we will be belong to the Lord's flock.

Some years ago, two scientists were on a field trip in the mountains. They discovered a baby eagle in a nest on a crag, just below the top of a steep and dangerous cliff. The baby

eagle had been deserted and they wanted to rescue it. They asked the young son of their guide if they could lower him on a rope to fetch the eaglet.

The boy was not at all enthused by their plan, so he declined. They offered him money, and then doubled it, but still the boy refused.

Finally, one of the scientists asked in despair, “Do you have any suggestions as to how we can save the bay eagle?” The mountain boy replied, “Sure! I’ll go down to rescue the bird for free, if you’ll let my dad hold the rope!” He trusted his dad completely. He knew he could count on his dad. He knew his dad would not let him down. This is the absolute trust that Jesus wants us to live in God.

God, the Father, is the only source of ultimate security of the believers in Jesus. The guarantee to the believer is grounded in the relationship between God the Father and Jesus. We are the sheep who are under the Lord’s guidance. The Lord is my shepherd I shall not be in want.

Dear Father, we thank you for sending your Son to save us, your lost and straying sheep. Amen.