

St. Andrew's Anglican Church – Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ - Rector

Scripture: John 10:11-16

"His Voice"

Can you just imagine the many hours that a shepherd spends with his or her sheep? The relationship that grows between them is remarkable. Think for a moment how your pets respond to your voice? They are thrilled when you get home when they hear you call out to them. They know you; they recognize what you say and certain words that mean so much to them. They know their "shepherd's" voice. Now think about the sheep. Each one of them knows their shepherd's voice. Somebody else might come to the sheepfold and they will not go near him at all, even if he calls out their correct names. And it is important to know that sheep have names. How would you like to have 100 sheep that you tend, or 50- and you know not only their characteristics – but their names, relating to them and treating each one accordingly. There is a relationship. The sheep are always listening for the one voice in their life that matters, the voice they trust. When they hear it, they will not need a sheepdog to keep them in line and he will not walk behind them. The shepherd walks ahead of them, calling to them, and they simply follow him.

In today's Holy Gospel Jesus describes not only the role of the shepherd, but how Jesus is our shepherd – calling Himself the "Good Shepherd." The words "good shepherd" used here in Greek are ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλὸς - (ha poimeyn ha kalows) which describe a person who is good – useful, free from defects, morally good, noble, and praiseworthy. To sweeten the pot a little – the precise translation of καλὸς is 'beautiful' – explaining the fact that the sheer attractiveness of what He is doing and the strong, compelling power of His love for those who under His care. Jesus proclaimed Himself "*the Good Shepherd*" and His love is overflowing, enduring, and never ending.

A shepherd would take his sheep out into the wild, where his life was always in danger, and so too does Jesus. Wherever we go, wherever it is that we have gone – maybe even to some not so nice places, our Shepherd is always with us. Sometimes we think we pull a fast one on God and some of the things we have done in our lives that He does not know about. Guess what? He was there! The Good Shepherd did indeed lay down His life for His sheep – sacrificing Himself once, before all others – so that those who believe in Him as the Only Son of God, would be safe from the "thief, the stranger, the hired hand" who cares nothing about the sheep and will hit the road "jack" when the "wolf" attacks – but the Good Shepherd never runs away, instead He defends His sheep, looks for those who reject Him, loves those who hate Him, and serves those who never acknowledge Him. Why would Jesus chase after someone who does not want to be chased? Jesus' love is so selfless that He does not care if He gets hurt in the process. Think about the cross – think about what He did and what He gave up. He did not care – He did it anyway.

Hear what God foretold through His prophet Ezekiel in chapter 34: "*I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were*

scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice. " 'As for you, my flock, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will judge between one sheep and another, and between rams and goats.' (Ezekiel 34:11-17)

In the Old Testament – God was often seen in the image of the shepherd of His people. Look at today's Psalm – Psalm 23, written by the shepherd David, which begins with the words "*The Lord is my shepherd.*" If you ever see pictures of the Negev, which is where David had his sheep – it is not so green! That was a wakeup call for us in 1999 and all of a sudden, in the Negev, we see clumps of green here and there, and our guide says to us – "that is the green pasture!" They will lie down near something to eat – and God is so good – He will provide even a clump for His sheep. The Prophet Isaiah describes the Lord God as He tends his flock like a shepherd: "*He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.*" (Isaiah 40:11) The Psalmist writes in Psalm 80:1-2 "*Hear us, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock; you who sit enthroned between the cherubim, shine forth before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh. Awaken your might; come and save us.*" When Jesus proclaimed Himself as the "*Good Shepherd*" I believe He was saying to us, His people, the people of God, when He said, "*I Am the Good Shepherd...*" that He made the connection for us not only to the many Scriptures about God as a shepherd, but that the prophecies about Him as shepherd all comes true in Jesus, as God.

In today's Holy Gospel reading, Jesus proclaimed "*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*" (John 10:11) This takes place just a short while before Jesus crosses the Jordan to await word that Lazarus has died. He then goes and calls Lazarus out of the tomb, by name. Lazarus is one of His sheep, and he heard Jesus' voice calling his name and he reacts. Then Jesus headed to Jerusalem, triumphantly coming through the city, and hailed as a King, in the last week of His life. He was proclaiming to those who would listen, and to those who would later follow, like us, that He is the Good Shepherd. He is the One who cares for His flock. He went on to say that He and the Father are One as He proclaimed, "*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. 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.*" (John 10:14-16) Jesus was talking about the Gentiles, like us, who would eventually come along and follow His voice. Why else would you get up on a Sunday morning to come to a building and sing all sorts of hymns, and listen to a guy in a pulpit go on and on? I only talk for about 10 minutes, but there are some who will speak for About 30 or 40

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minutes or longer. Why do you do that? Because you have heard the voice of the Shepherd, and He is calling you to follow Him, no matter where it is, no matter what flavor or denomination that you believe in – and you follow - Jesus is there. What matters is Who it is about. I have often said – it is not about what you know – but it is about Who you know! If you know Jesus, my friends, you are saved! I do not know about you, but I cannot wait for that day when there will be one flock and one Shepherd! God does not want to lose anyone – but the choice to hear His voice is theirs. The invitation is there. Just think of John 3:16 – the word world is not just one denomination or Coffee County, or New York or Israel – it is the whole world – and that includes your name and mine.

We are called to love others like the Good Shepherd; like Jesus Christ loves us, not caring about the consequences or the aftermath. We too are called to walk on treacherous ground in His love knowing He will never let us fall. He always works for the good of those who love Him. He knows our names, and we can recognize His voice calling us.