

Fourth Sunday of Easter, Sunday, May 3, 2020, Year A

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: John 10:1-10

"Hear His Voice"

In the Bible, the picture of the shepherd with his sheep is often used to refer to a king and his people or a leader and his people. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David - were all shepherds leading the people of Israel. Today, when we think of leaders, we get the image of people who are running huge companies, or corporations. Quite often these kinds of people are 'removed' from most of the people who work in their organization and don't see them face to face, they might watch them on surveillance videos, and they probably don't even know the names of very many - and they have someone else - or a department communicate with their people. But in the Bible the ideal king is pictured as a shepherd - like the description in Ezekiel chapter 34 - which very well might be modelled after the young shepherd-boy, that ruddy complexioned boy named David, who became the king after God's own heart. In a world where they knew about the intimate contact and trust between shepherd and sheep, this was their preferred way of talking about kingship.

In today's Holy Gospel, Jesus gives us an image that people in first century Israel were pretty familiar with. Jesus shows the way a shepherd keeps the sheep safe, and, like God himself in Psalm 121:8, "*watches over their going out and their coming in.*" The main job of the shepherd is the safety, and care of the sheep. The shepherd has total focus on the sheep. You know what - the only king like that is the Lord's anointed One - the Messiah - Jesus.

Once a shepherd's flock has been separated from any of the other sheep that are not in his care, he takes them out to the pasture. Near the pasture is a pen just for the sheep. He then takes his place in the doorway or entrance and acts as a door or gate to the pasture. The sheep can go out to the pasture in front of the pen, or if they are afraid, they can back up into the security of the pen. I want to suggest to you that Jesus is giving us His insight - which is that He is the ONLY Gate by which people can enter into the safety and blessing of God's provision for them for all eternity. Jesus makes this even clearer on the night that He will be arrested by saying "*I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.*" (John 14:6)

Often, the shepherd lies down at night in the gateway, to stop the sheep getting out and to stop any predators from getting in.

Jesus is making a contrast between true shepherds and false ones - who Jesus says are thieves and robbers, complete strangers to the sheep. I think that Jesus was referring to various people in leadership during His own lifetime - maybe Zealots or revolutionary leaders who were eager to lead Israel into confrontation with the Romans. There were others like the ruling house of Herod, who easily submitted to the ruling power of Rome - so that they could keep their own power and wealth in place - it was job security. Here in John's Gospel - this event takes place right after Jesus healed the blind man and so the Pharisees were out to get Jesus for doing that - not only doing that - but He did it on the Sabbath.

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In Jesus' bringing this shepherding image to these people - He is, in a sense, asking the question: how will you know God's true, appointed King when He comes? Well, you can tell the true king the very same way you can tell the true shepherd. Anybody could turn up in Jerusalem and tout himself, proclaiming to be a leader or a Messiah. But only the One who comes by the way God has been appointed and anointed Him to do so - anyone else is the untrue shepherd. Anyone can call followers, but the sign of the real King is the response that comes from hearts, when people hear His voice and, in loving trust, follow Him.

By the way, right after today's Holy Gospel - Jesus went on to talk about being the shepherd for His people. Beginning with verse 11 of chapter 10, Jesus says: *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns 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. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. "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."* (John 10:11-15)

In Jesus' saying, *"I am the Good Shepherd"* He was telling the world that *"I AM WHO I AM."* In effect Jesus was saying the very same thing when He said:

- *"I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life,"*
- *"I am the resurrection and the life"*
- *"I am the bread of life"*
- *"I am the gate"*
- *"I am the vine"*
- *"I am the Light of the world"*

He is showing His love for His people - His sheep - He is their shepherd - their Good Shepherd as He said, *"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 can't help but think that every time those seven "I Am" statements in the Gospel of John are proclaimed by Jesus - I go back to Exodus chapter 3, when Moses asked the burning bush - who shall I say sent me? God Himself answered, *"I AM WHO I AM."* (Exodus 3:14) Jesus is the "Great I Am."

If you are in relationship with Jesus, you are that important to God! God speaks to us through His Word, He cares for us and watches over us - providing for us and protecting us. Even more importantly - God loves us so much that He laid down His very life on our behalf. Think for a moment -

- that Jesus Christ, your Good Shepherd - stood in the way of the one who seeks to drag you down, to make you feel guilty for your sins, but instead Jesus paid the price for your sins and for your life - your eternal life.

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- Jesus, your Good Shepherd willingly laid down His life for you – His loving sheep. My brothers and sisters -you are that precious to Him. Listen today, to take the time to hear His voice, and follow Him.