

## John 10:1-18

Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

So again Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they might have life and have it abundantly.

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away--and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own 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 do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my father.”

## “Listening To His Voice”

“. . . and they will listen to my voice.”

John 10:15c

When it comes to matters of ultimate concern to the soul, (life and death, moral conscience, meaning and purpose) what I've noticed is that friends and family at services of remembrance for loved ones who have died, get a mesmerized look on their faces the moment they hear the opening verse from psalm 23. **‘The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want.’** At the time of death the soul wants what it wants. The image of shepherd for God seems to grab everyone's attention. **‘Thou makest me to lie down in green pastures.’** Grieving souls need to be comforted with faith in a shepherding God who cares for them. **‘Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for thou art with me.’** Uncertain souls need to be assured that a Shepherding God is making a special place for them in their Maker's heart. **‘Thou preparest a table for me in the presence of my enemies, thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows.’** Fearful souls need to be relieved from the dark shadow of feeling alone and on one's own. **‘For thou art with me.’** In matters of ultimate concern to the soul, meditating on the image of a Shepherding God is faith's time for soaking up ‘God-With-Us-Presence’. Here, WITH is the watch word. With is about internalizing Holy Companionship. The soul wants what it wants. And what the soul wants is companionship of a Good and Merciful God. **‘Surely Goodness and Mercy will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.’**

When all become quiet with the hearing of psalm 23 at services of remembrance, dwelling in the house of the Lord forever is heard as a loving call to live with our Good and Merciful Lord in the home in the eternal heart of God. When David wrote the psalm however, his prayer was for his now rather than his later. David, shepherd boy who became Israel's second anointed king; David, the man who was on the run because he had sinned against his fellow man; and David, the soul who had sinned against God, wanted God to companion him in a

shepherding way back to the Holy life that he knew back in Jerusalem. **The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.**

In his devotional on a verse from Deuteronomy 6:10-25: **'Do not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who are all around you'**, Rev. Martin Copenhaver wrote: A cartoon in a magazine depicts a man and a woman leaving worship. The sign outside the church announces that the sermon topic for the day was the Ten Commandments. The man says, "Well, at least I haven't made any graven images lately." The sad truth is, if the man in the cartoon is anything like us, he has made graven images---that is idols, false gods. Today, no longer are we tempted to worship gods by the name of Zeus, or Apollo. Now we are wooed by gods name Education or Success, or Family or Money. Paul Tillich, an influential theologian of the last century, defined God as a person's "ultimate concern." If you want to know what your ultimate concern is---or, to put it another way, if you want to know what your idols are---ask yourself these questions: Where is your ultimate loyalty? What do you consistently make time for? In what have you put your trust? Where can you be most deeply threatened? (In whom do you trust?) No one ever says, "I'm going to worship an idol now." Instead, idolatry happens when we invest our fullest energy and our ultimate allegiance in those things---perhaps even good things---that are not ultimate.

In John's gospel Jesus described himself as the Good Shepherd who knows his own; who won't let ego fears within and worldly threats without snatch souls from God's realm of love; and, who brings back idol worshipping runaways through trust in his word, and a careful listening for his voice. There's an old TV series, Horatio Hornblower, that portrays a tall ship sea captain whose good shepherding leadership style wins the trust of his men. Each week he puts his own life on line for his men. When one of his men falls away from the group in mutiny, Horatio runs after him, dodging gunfire from the enemy to keep him from running away. When one of his men disobeys orders,

and in doing so puts the whole crew in harms' way, instead of sending his men into the threatening situation to retrieve him, he goes after the man himself instead of risking the well being of his whole crew. Once, after a failed attempt by some of his men to escape from prison in which three guards were killed, instead of divulging the name of the man who engineered the escape, Horatio took the wrap, saying: "I am responsible.' The thing that captures my attention here, is not that Horatio consistently comes out the hero, but that his men grow to trust and love him because of his sacrificial, protective leadership style. More importantly, over time their captain's voice became the voice of authority within which allowed them to model his way of protecting and caring for others.

Tuesday I received a tragic text from my daughter who teaches senior high school English in Round Rock Texas.

**Yesterday was tough. Got word that a student I worked with for 3 years at Lake Travis and advocated for his senior year- a transgender person needing protection- committed suicide on Friday. His parents still aren't recognizing him. Very, very, sad.**

Sad and anger is what I felt. Angry that the rejecting voices of his parents and peers that damaged his developing sense of self, won over the protective Good Shepherd voice of Jesus that God imprinted on his soul.

As I see it, a primary focus of Christ's Church as people of the resurrection, is to help each other internalize the Good Shepherd image of God and to prayerfully discern the guiding voice of Christ, the Good Shepherd as He leads our community of faith today. I believe what Joan Chittister said about the first Easter people is true for us too: "The death of Jesus left a fledging faith community bereft until they themselves rose out of his grave to begin life over again, wiser for what they knew, stronger for what he was, determined now to finish what had already been begun."