April 21, 2024 **ENFOLDED BY LOVE**

The fourth Sunday after Easter has been traditionally known as the Shepherd Sunday. In our Gospel passage for today, St. John 10:11-18, in verse 11we read “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.”

Jesus was telling the people a parable about a good shepherd. A shepherd who was honest, caring, compassionate, and will die to take care of his sheep. Jesus is also telling us something about himself, as he is the good shepherd of our lives. Jesus uses the example that people can understand, a parable about shepherds to tell us something about himself, that he is the good shepherd of our lives.

Jesus uses this parable about shepherds because the people in his days knew the kind of life that a shepherd lived, it was a difficult and a hard life. A shepherd felt he had a calling from a young age to tend to sheep, so he spent his whole young life learning how to care for the sheep, then the rest of his adult life tending the sheep will be easy for him, fighting the animals who would attack the sheep, and sometimes fighting with robbers who would steal the sheep. Shephard’s life was a lonely life, a difficult life, but if a shepherd did his job well everyone would know that he was a good shepherd.

What an important and timely message to hear from our crucified and risen Lord. We are known by the shepherd! We are known by God! And we are known intimately, not just by our numbers. Jesus knows us personally. He knows us by our character. He knows what is in our heart and soul. He knows us by our name.

According to John 10:2-3, Jesus says “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. I want all of us to recollect and think about our baptism, to reflect upon. This important sacrament of the church, the baptism, we have witnessed many times during our worship. If it is a child being baptized, the parents say that they present their child for baptism by stating his or her name. And if a person chooses to be baptized as an adult, they acknowledge that they wish to be baptized by stating their own name. Then, following the prayers and the vows and the statement of faith, the person receives the water baptism by the pastor stating their name and acknowledging that they are being baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

The mentioning of the name of the person being baptized and the name of our Triune God is significant. For it is personal. In this sacrament, God embraces us by name, as his own child, as we acknowledge the beginning of a new relationship with God, by addressing God by his name. Of course, being in such an intimate relationship, where we are known by our name, known by our identity and not just by our numbers, carries with it a responsibility to live our lives reflecting that relationship. When you are known personally and intimately by your name, you can’t hide behind your numbers. What you do and say is a witness to what is in your heart, and a reflection to the rest of those who bear your name.

And if you are honest with yourself, there are a lot of times that we have failed to reflect a true witness, not only to our family name, but also have failed to reflect a true witness to the name of God, who has adopted us as his own, through our baptism into Christ’s death and resurrection. Today if you say, I thought I knew the Good Shepherd, but I don’t know His voice, His touch, His compassion, His love, and His discipline.” Then either you have been led astray by a hireling, or else you have become grossly detached from His flock.

In either case, the Bible teaches us that the Good Shepherd has left the flock in search of you. Today, He is calling out to you and with His rod and staff he was to comfort you and bring you into His fold. Stop resisting Him and allow Him to care for you – come and get to know the Shepherd of your soul.

If you would like to learn more about Jesus as a good Shephard, please join us in our Sunday worship at 11:00 AM.

Peace!

Rev. Dr. Christopher Ponnuraj

Minister

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