

*"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*

- Story of catching a sheep in Wales.
- Hard to do—couldn't get near them.
- We tried all kinds of voices—even used a Welsh-ish accent to lure the sheep to come to us.
- Nope. No dice.

Why? No relationship with the sheep.

We weren't the shepherds.

And the sheep would scatter away from us.

This pastoral image comes right in the middle of a fight Jesus is having with the Pharisees—Jesus cured a blind man on the Sabbath in chapter 9, the Pharisees are pissed off at him for doing so—this is Jesus' start of a rebuttal to the confrontation.

The stakes in this passage are literally life and death for Jesus. The Pharisees have come out to stone Jesus to death. Think angry mob.

Who is Jesus talking to? Pharisees.

The main point is made in verse 13: whereas the hired hand does not care for the sheep because they are not his, the good shepherd does. They are his sheep, they belong to him, they have an intimate relationship with him ("I know my own and my own know me").

#### Intimate knowledge

Knowledge here has to do with the knowledge that friends and family have of each other, the emotional tie between husband and wife, father and children.

#### Good Shepherd vs. Hired hands

John's gospel written about 90 CE;

Seige of Jerusalem began a few days before Passover and ended August 30, 70 AD—the temple was destroyed, most of Jerusalem was leveled. Over 1.1 million died—mostly Jews (coming to Jerusalem for the Passover)

Historian Josephus—who was employed by the Romans as a negotiator wrote: "but for all the rest of the wall [surrounding Jerusalem], it was so thoroughly laid even with the ground by those that dug it up to the foundation, that there was left nothing to make those that came thither believe it [Jerusalem] had ever been inhabited."

#### John's community

Open warfare between the new Christians

John's reference to those who run away were the Jewish leaders who fled and abandoned their people during the Seige and reconstructed Judaism afterwards.

But what does the Good Shepherd do?

Something unique and totally different—never before seen in communal life: The leader lays down his life for the community—suffers for the community, gives EVERYTHING for the community, the sheep his flock.

In the giving of his life Jesus does something for the community that no one else has ever done. All past leaders avoided suffering for the community.

#### Deep need for relationship

God's deep desire to have us know God

Creation's deep desire and need to know the Creator.

God longs for us to be in relationship with God—intimate relationship

So intimate that when we hear the voice of God we know instantly that it is God who is calling, God who is talking, God who is leading, loving, caring for, and guiding us.

Need we have to be shepherded

Need God in Christ has to be our shepherd

#### Being The Good Shepherd

The good shepherd lays down his life. The phrase is repeated five times in these nine verses

Being the Good Shepherd comes at a cost.

FAR easier to run away when the wolves come.

FAR less costly—personally costly—to just flee and let the sheep fend for themselves.

But when we care, are in true and deep relationship with one another, with God, intimate relationship with the risen Christ—it becomes FAR harder to leave...in point of fact, we cannot.

Who would, seeing your son or daughter, your spouse, in dire trouble would turn around and walk away? You cannot. Out of caring, out of responsibility, out of love you cannot abandon those you love.

And, neither could God. Witness John 3:16. God so loved the world...

Jesus says he has the power to lay down his life and the power to pick it back up again—he can make a choice about how and for whom he lays down his life. And so do we.

Christians as called "Easter people." We believe in newness of life, in eternal life, in forgiveness and salvation. None of those things happen when we are the hired hand who does not care for—CARE FOR—the sheep. Care about, care for, be in relationship with, give generously to the betterment of, know fully, be fully known by.

When we do all of those things not just for our flock here—but for those who need to know the love of Christians of Episcopalians, of disciples of Jesus who worship at ST. MARTIN'S—we are becoming less like the hired hand who at best turns a blind eye to the impending problem, and at worst literally runs away, and more like the example of who God wants us to be—The Good Shepherd.

As a community, how do we become less like hired hands and more like the good shepherd? How does that play itself out in ways that are outside of just “caring about one another?” What about what we give and how we employ the skills and talents we have been given by God? What about giving of our resources to the aid of not only our church, but so that ministry can happen that aids the entire community—that helps heal the world?

AMEN.