

1 Peter 2:24-25

Dear Sheep of the Good Shepherd,

Each year we set aside one Sunday in the season of Easter to focus on the fact that Jesus is our Good Shepherd. It's a picture of Jesus that is known and loved by almost everyone even though none of us here have experience shepherding sheep in Palestine. Today Peter reminds us why the thought of Jesus being our Good Shepherd is so dear to us. He says, "Look at what your Good Shepherd has done for you!"

Peter reminds us of the words of Isaiah when he says **you were like sheep going astray**. Like Adam and Eve in the garden we thought we knew better than our Good Shepherd. We thought we saw greener pastures and more abundant supplies of water on the other side of the fence. We thought we would be better off on our own, doing our own thing instead of listening to the Shepherd's voice. Sheep that wander off on their own to do their own thing are in grave danger.

As Jesus explains, a hireling shepherd wouldn't have cared that sheep were wandering off on their own. A hireling shepherd would have thought, "if they don't want to listen, fine, let them go. We'll see how it turns out for them. I'm not going to waste my time and effort or put myself in danger to go after them." But Jesus is the Good Shepherd because he doesn't think that way. He is the Good Shepherd because he leaves the 99 behind to go after the one lost sheep and he doesn't give up looking until he finds it. He is the Good Shepherd because he was willing to put in unbelievable time and effort, even to put his own life on the line in order to rescue sheep that had wandered away and were in danger of being devoured by the roaring lion Satan and being lost for all eternity.

Consider what our Good Shepherd went through to rescue us. First he became one of the sheep, a lamb, a very special lamb, a lamb without blemish or defect. He identified with us. He knows what it's like to be hungry and thirsty. He knows what it's like to be tempted to wander off to greener pastures. Satan offered to give him all the riches of the kingdoms of the world if he would just bow down and worship him instead of the Father. But unlike us, Jesus resisted every temptation. He remained a perfect lamb without blemish or defect, **he committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth**. Yet he was arrested. His friends deserted him and it must have seemed that everyone else was hurling insults at him. He suffered. He was slapped and beaten bloody and finally nailed to the cross. This all happened not because of anything he had done. This all happened because he was bearing our sins. He was the scape goat. He made himself an offering on the altar of the cross. As we heard last week, it was not gold or silver that God required as payment for the sins of the world, but Jesus' holy precious blood. **He himself bore OUR sins in his body on the tree; by his wounds you have been healed** because he was wounded in your place.

In our Old Testament lesson we heard David talking about how he rescued sheep from lions and bears and then he went out and rescued Israel from Goliath and the Philistines. Our Good Shepherd has rescued us from much worse. He has rescued us from Satan and an eternity of suffering of body and soul in Hell. He has shown us that he wants us to be a part of his flock, to live in his sheep pen and have him shepherd and watch over, providing us with green pastures and quiet waters forever and ever.

No wonder we like to celebrate the fact that Jesus is our Good Shepherd. It reminds us of his great love for us which he demonstrated by all that he has done to save us and make us part of

his fold. But did you notice that Peter doesn't just mention that our Good Shepherd went out of his way and paid for our sins so that we wouldn't be lost. He reminds us of what Paul also says in Romans. Jesus did all these things for us so that **we might die to sins and live for righteousness.**

This is a reminder we need. We often stress what Jesus has done for us. We stress that there is nothing we can do to save ourselves, and that's the truth. We stress that in Jesus all our sins are forgiven. We rejoice that Jesus shows us how much God loves us. We talk about what Jesus has saved us from, from the devil, from the eternal effects of sin, from the fear of death because he rose from the dead. But we often forget to talk about the fact that Jesus didn't just save us from something. He saved us for something. He saved us that we might be his own live under him in his fold. He purchased us as his own to be people who are **eager to do what is good.** In other words, he didn't save us so that we could do whatever we want and ignore him and his word. Our forgiveness is never to be used as a license or an excuse to sin.

Both Peter and Paul describe baptized Christians as those who have died to sin. When we remember what our Good Shepherd did to save us and someone or something tempts us to wander from the flock and do or say something that we know is displeasing to our Good Shepherd, we want to be like a corpse. No matter what anyone says, no matter how hard they try to get us to wander from the fold we don't hear them, we don't even move a muscle to follow them. Like a corpse, we aren't affected by what they say or do. But, when we hear the voice of our Good Shepherd, we are alive, our ears are open, we pay attention, we are ready to do anything and everything he asks of us. **We die to sin and live for righteousness.** We see that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit and we offer ourselves to the Lord as living sacrifices to God; as instruments of what is good and pleasing to him, as instruments of righteousness.

That's the way our Good Shepherd wants it to be. That's the way we want it to be as we consider all that our Good Shepherd has done for us. But we know that's not the way that it always is. At times it is just the opposite. At times it seems that we are alive to sin and dead to righteousness. Sometimes we choose to tune out the voice of our Good Shepherd and wander off on our own again. But, like any shepherd, Jesus has a shepherd's staff, and if needed, he can use that staff to reach out and yank us away from trouble. He can give us a whack with his staff to wake us up and get us to listen to his voice. He may do this through parents or teachers who discipline us when we do or say something wrong.

I remember a professor who was speaking to one of our pastors' conferences commenting about how grateful he was that his grade school principal at the Lutheran school he attended took the time to discipline him. Apparently this professor, when he was in grade school, was running some kind of extortion scam on his fellow students, something like "pay me money or I'll take your lunch." He felt that if his principal had not caught him and disciplined him he would likely have gone on to a life of crime instead of becoming a professor at a Christian college.

Our Good Shepherd may use our parents or teachers to discipline us to keep us from wandering from the fold. He may use an accident or a hospital stay to remind us that we can't make it on our own, we need him. He may have an elder or another fellow Christian point out to us that we are straying from the fold and in danger of losing all that he has done for us. As long as we

live on the earth and still have a sinful nature we need our Good Shepherd to use his staff to correct us when we are wrong and to guide us in the way that he would have us go.

Look what your Good Shepherd has done for you! He bore your sins in his body on the tree of the cross. He suffered so that you don't have to suffer. He rescued you from eternal suffering. As you consider all that he has done for you, remember, you are dead to sin--when it comes to sins it's as if you were a corpse. But as you hear your Good Shepherd's voice, and remember what he has done for you, you are eager to do all that he asks and live for righteousness.