

Easter II
A Sermon by
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April 26, 2009

A Sunday School teacher decided to have her young class memorize one of the most quoted passages in the Bible; the 23rd *Psalm*. She gave the youngsters a month to learn the Psalm. Little Ricky was excited about the task—but, he just couldn't remember the Psalm. After much practice, he could barely get past the first line. On the day that the kids were scheduled to recite *Psalm 23* in front of the congregation, Ricky was very nervous. When it was his turn, he stepped up to the microphone and said proudly, “The Lord is my Shepherd, and that’s all I need to know.”

Today is Good Shepherd Sunday. It is called this because of today’s Gospel lesson from the Gospel of *John*.

I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. The hireling, who is not a real shepherd, and to whom the sheep do not really belong, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep, and runs away; and the wolf seizes them and scatters them. He abandons the sheep because he is a hireling, and the sheep are nothing to him. I am the good shepherd, and I know my own sheep, and my own sheep know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. But I have other sheep which are not of this fold. These too I must bring in, and they will hear my voice; and they will become one flock, and there will be one shepherd. (John 10:1–16, William Barclay’s translation¹).

It is interesting to note, “that while the [authors of the first three Gospels] report our Lord’s teaching in the form of parables, S. John gives [our Lord’s teaching] in the form of allegories.”² That is what today’s Gospel is—an allegory.

“In the earlier part of...chapter [10] the contrast is between the shepherd and the thief. But in verse 11 our Lord turns to another contrast—[the contrast] between the shepherd (who is the owner of the sheep) and the hireling. The whole point of the contrast lies in the fact that the hireling has no [interest in nor]

¹ William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, Vol. 2, 2nd Ed., (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), pp. 69, 70, 72.

² J. H. B. Masterman, *Sunday Teaching: The Collects, Epistles and Gospels*, (London: SPCK, 1940), p. 160.

personal affection for the sheep, and therefore (a) does not risk his life for them, (b) does not know them, [and] (c) does not gather them.”³

Jesus starts by saying, *I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep*. “The idea of God as the shepherd of Israel was familiar in the Old Testament. It conveyed the idea of protection and guidance. [But] Our Lord added a deeper thought—that of sacrifice. None of the [Old Testament] prophets had dared to think of God as giving His life for the people. Notice in this connection the special word used here for “good.” [The Greek word] is not *agathos*, [which means] “good in itself,” [or good in character,] but *kalos*, [which denotes something that is intrinsically good, and so the word is often translated] “beautiful.” The good shepherd, [or the beautiful shepherd, is intrinsically good and] shows his goodness by giving his life for the sheep. To the question, How do we know that God is good? the final answer is, the Cross. The good shepherd values the life of his sheep more than his own, because they are helpless and dependent, and cannot defend themselves. It is the supreme law of the kingdom [of God] that the strong must serve the weak. [In the book of Ezekiel] the final condemnation of the faithless shepherd [is] that he feeds himself and not the flock (*Ezek. 34:2*).”⁴

Then Jesus says, *I am the good shepherd, and I know my own sheep, and my own sheep know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep*. “The sympathy between sheep and shepherd...is so deep and intimate that it is like the union of the Father with the Son (cp. *John 6:57; 14:20; 15:10*). So the hireling drives his sheep, while the shepherd leads them. The only influence that Jesus Christ would use was the influence of love. Force had no place in His kingdom (18:36). When He speaks of the ‘other sheep,’ He says, ‘Them also I must lead’ (not ‘bring’ [as it is usually translated]). The Greek word⁵ here has the sense of ‘bring along’ by leading instead of by force.] The Son knows the Father through *identity of nature*, so the Christian knows his Lord through identity of nature—because the Spirit of Christ is dwelling in him (15:26; 17:23). And the Spirit of Christ is the Spirit of sacrifice—‘I lay down My life for the sheep.’ We cannot know Christ till we catch His spirit of sacrifice (see *1 John 3:16*).”⁶

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Masterman, pp. 160–161.

⁵ Agw which means “to lead,” “to lead along,” or “to bring.”

⁶ Masterman, p. 161.

Finally, Jesus says, *But I have other sheep which are not of this fold. These too I must bring in, and they will hear my voice; and they will become one flock, and there will be one shepherd.* “The purpose of the wolf is to destroy and scatter; the purpose of the shepherd to save and to gather. The ‘other sheep not of this fold,’ conveys the idea of scattered sheep, undefended and unsheltered (see *John* 11:52; *Matt.* 9:36). ‘Them also I must lead,’ or, to give the full force of the word, ‘over them also I must claim the right of leadership.’ The mistranslation of the words that follow has done much harm. It is not one fold but one *flock*—that is, they are to become one not merely because they are sheltered in one place, but because they are subject to one leadership. They are one flock because they have one shepherd (the reference is, of course, to *Ezek.* 34:23). We must not miss the significance of ‘must.’ It is the Divine purpose that all the scattered sheep shall be gathered. The mission work of the Church is the very ground of its existence. The ‘must’ of Jesus is a challenge.”⁷

“Notice, in conclusion, how this picture of the sheep and shepherd brings out the personal and collective relation of men to Jesus Christ. Every sheep is known to the shepherd, separately and individually, not one shall be lost. But they are a flock, a community that lives and acts together, not each going its own way, but obeying a common governance. So the wolf (the spirit of evil) seeks not only to destroy individuals but also to scatter the community—to break up the unity of the Christian society.”⁸

As I said at the beginning, today is Good Shepherd Sunday and, “There is no better loved picture of Jesus than the picture of Him as the Good Shepherd. [And] the picture of the shepherd is deeply woven into the language and the imagery of the Bible.”⁹ [If you every met a shepherd living in Israel you would] “‘understand why the shepherd of Judaea sprang to the front in his people’s history; why they gave his name to their king, and made him the symbol of providence; why Christ took him as the type of self-sacrifice.’ Constant vigilance, fearless courage, patient love for his flock, were the necessary characteristics of the shepherd.”¹⁰ So “When we think of the word shepherd it should paint a picture to us of the unceasing vigilance and patience of the love of God; and it should remind us of our duty towards our fellow-men...”¹¹

⁷ Masterman, p. 161–162.

⁸ Masterman, p. 162.

⁹ Barclay, p. 61.

¹⁰ Barclay, p. 61–62.

¹¹ Barclay, p. 63.

So maybe little Ricky was right, “The Lord is my Shepherd, and that’s all I need to know.”

Sources:

Barclay, William. *The Gospel of John*, Vol. 2, 2nd Ed. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956.

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