

4th Sunday of Easter (B)

Good Shepherd

On this 4th Sunday of Easter each year we read a portion of the Gospel where Jesus speaks of the Good Shepherd. While it seems that his original intent with these words was a blistering indictment of the religious leaders of his time... for us it may have some additional application as we shepherd the relationships in our life.

Most of us here in North Dallas probably don't know much about shepherds... there is very little undeveloped land around here anymore for grazing... and... after all this is Texas and this is cattle country...right?

If Jesus said I am the good cattle driver I know my cattle and they know me... we probably still wouldn't know much of which he speaks.... but it might at least sound somewhat familiar.

But what if he said... I am the good mom... or I am the good dad... I know my kids and they know me... and I will lay down my life for my kids and I will do this freely, willingly and completely.

Or if he said... I am the good spouse... or I am the good son or daughter or brother or sister... or I am the good friend... these descriptions might resonate more with us today... but regardless of the images we use... we are called to embrace the attributes of the Good Shepherd in all or relationships.

Jesus shares his Good Shepherd job description with us as he say the Good Shepherd:

- Lays down his life for his sheep;
- Knows his sheep;
- Has other sheep not of this fold that he must lead; and
- That he does this all freely... in accordance with the Father's command.

If we are the sincere followers of Jesus that we are called to be... then we must do as He has done. Some of what Jesus is expressing in this parable of the Good Shepherd is another way of sharing his recurring message of... love God and love your neighbor. The Good Shepherd loves God, and does the will of the Father... by working tirelessly in caring for the sheep.

We express our love of God most notable through our love of neighbor.

Since we are not shepherds by profession we are not called to tend actual sheep but rather to be attentive to those in our life... to be the good people we are called to be... we must choose to love God and choose to love neighbor... neighbor near and far.

We must choose... To Love God in such a way that you only want to do the will of the Father... Loving God enough to do his will freely, exclusively, and totally.... to follow what God commands joyfully without consideration of the costs... and it will cost you something.

We must choose to love neighbor in such a way that you know their wants and needs because you engage them up close and personally... to realize that you have more neighbors and family and friends than you think you do... and that you are willing to sacrifice of yourself for all others.

- Are you willing to lay down the parts of your life that prevent you from loving all neighbors... cynicism... defensiveness...pride... selfishness?
- Are you willing to lay down prejudices and practices of exclusion.... be they based on religious...social...political.... or geographic beliefs?
- Are you willing to lay down some of your financial resources to help those in need?

- Are you willing to lay down your schedule for those in your life who hunger for your companionship... your acknowledgement... your recognition...your presence...your attention?

It would be much easier to think this parable is only applied to religious leadership but that is far too narrow a view. The Gospels have most meaning when we see their personal applications in our life.

In his Apostolic Exhortation *“Rejoice and Be Glad”*... Pope Francis reminds us of our individual call to holiness in today’s world and reiterates with determination the importance of love of God and love of neighbor as he writes:

We may think that we give glory to God only by our worship and prayer, or simply by following certain ethical norms. It is true that the primacy belongs to our relationship with God, but we cannot forget that the ultimate criterion on which our lives will be judged is what we have done for others. Prayer is most precious, for it nourishes a daily commitment to love. Our worship becomes pleasing to God when we devote ourselves to living generously, and allow God’s gift, granted in prayer, to be shown in our concern for our brothers and sisters. (Para. 104)

So then... let our prayer and worship and love of God be made known in our love of neighbor.