

## **Sermon for July 19, 2015**

“As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.” Sheep without a shepherd; what does it mean to be a sheep without a shepherd? Without a shepherd sheep can get into a lot of trouble; they can wander off and get lost where they run out of food and water and can become a meal for a larger predator. We are more often like the lost sheep in this reading than we care to admit. We would rather imagine ourselves as the ones being compassionate than the ones being lost and in need.

The crowds in today’s reading come to Jesus for many reasons—for healing, for teaching, and for what was missing in their lives. Their supposed shepherd, King Herod, was too busy throwing parties with his cronies as we saw last Sunday to be bothered with taking care of the people in his charge. Jesus saw their many needs and he took compassion on them. No, he didn’t pity them—the people are never described as pitiful. He felt sorry for them a feeling that he felt in his gut; a feeling that moved him into action. So he healed them, taught them and as we’ll see next week he fed them. Jesus was their true shepherd even though most of those following him—including the disciples didn’t know it yet.

We’ve all been lost in our lives. I’ve been lost more than once and I’m sure because of our sinful human nature I’ll be lost again. Contrary to what some people think; pastors aren’t immune from sin and separation from God as the article in yesterday’s Free Press shows us. There was a time in my life when I questioned that Jesus truly was the Son of God and not just a very special

human being endowed with wonderful gifts. The people I was talking with about this had very convincing Biblical evidence to support their views. I listened to them and checked their references, but I still questioned. I prayed a lot about this and one night I was led to read John 1:1 for my night time devotions: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” After reading this I had no more doubts about who Jesus is; but I couldn’t have done it on my own. It was only through the prodding of the Holy Spirit that I was led to this verse and only through the Holy Spirit did I understand its meaning.

We are so much like that crowd—lost and without a shepherd, but we don’t want to admit it. Our society tells us that we are a people who pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps; we don’t need anyone to help us—we know exactly where we are and what we are doing. But in those moments when we are able to shut out the world and look deep within ourselves we realize that we are lost, that we feel separated from God and that we need help.

It is in those moments we go to another of our readings for today—the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. This Psalm is requested by most of our shut-ins when I give them communion; it is remembered by those who can’t remember where they are and it is requested to be read at many funerals. There is a reason why this Psalm is so beloved—it shows us what it is like when we are cared for by the shepherd. When the Lord is our shepherd we have no wants; we rest in green pastures; we are refreshed and renewed; we are led in right paths and are no longer lost; we have no fear for we are not alone; we are protected and comforted; we are healed; we are fed; we are beloved.

When Martin Luther felt lost he would remind himself that he was a baptized child of God. He wrote that we should remember our baptisms each morning as we splash water on our faces. We remember that the waters of our baptism have drowned the evil forces that are trying to separate us from God. We remember that we have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever.

It is through the cross of Christ that we are no longer separated from God. It is through the cross of Christ that we are promised eternal life. It is through the cross of Christ that every time we receive Holy Communion we are fed and nourished with his body and blood; renewed and refreshed for our work in the world. It is through the cross of Christ that we are not alone.

Christ saw the crowds and had compassion for them—teaching, healing and feeding them. Christ sees us lost and has compassion for us—teaching, healing and feeding us. Christ sees the lost world and has compassion for it—so much compassion that he went to the cross so we would never be lost or alone again. Christ the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep bringing us safely back to the fold—back into God’s arms. Let us pray:

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie  
Down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;  
He restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for  
His name’s sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I  
Fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff  
They comfort me. You prepare a table before me in  
The presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil;  
My cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall  
Follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell  
In the house of the LORD my whole life long. Amen.