

The Lord is My Shepherd
John 10:1-16
May 12, 2019 – Fourth Sunday of Easter

If you were at our 8:00 a.m. Easter Sunday service, you heard me speak about what I called the “so-what” of Easter. At that service I stated that, when teaching Biblical Studies, I often ask the class, “So what? So the Bible says thus and such. So what? So what is the significance of this for us today?” And I told that Easter Son-rise congregation that the “so-what” of Easter is the very brief sayings of Jesus as reported at the very end of Matthew’s Gospel, concluding with the promise: “Remember, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matt 28:20) And, I might call today’s lesson a “so-what” of the “so-what.” So Christ is with us always. So what?

I have mentioned before that the Gospel of John contains seven “I AM” sayings of Jesus. Those very words, “I AM” were, in first century Judaism, a declaration of divinity. When God appeared to Moses in the burning bush of Exodus Chapter 3, Moses asks, “When the people inquire of me, whom shall I say sent me?” And God responded, “I AM who I AM; tell them I AM sent you.” From that time on, Jews have reserved those words, “I AM” as the proper name of God. You may remember, on Good Friday, when the temple guards came to arrest Jesus, he asked, “Whom do you seek?” They responded, “Jesus of Nazareth,” and Jesus stated, “I AM he.” And the people fell to their knees. Indeed the statement of “I AM” was a claim of divinity. To the believer, it was a declaration of the presence of “the Holy,” and to the nonbeliever, it was blasphemy.

So, in today’s reading, we have two “I AM” sayings: “I AM the gate,” and “I AM the good shepherd.” Our Psalter reading for today is certainly the most familiar psalm in the entire Bible. “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul.”

The Gospel of John tells us that Jesus is the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd calls his own sheep by name and leads them out; and his sheep follow him, because they know his voice. Do you remember the Easter Story. Mary is standing outside the tomb weeping when Jesus appears; but she does not recognize him *until* he calls her name. Indeed, I do believe that statement is a direct link to today’s reading: the Shepherd calls his sheep by name, and his sheep follow because they know his voice.

I’m here to tell you today, that the Good Shepherd is also calling your name. Listen. Do you hear him? He’s calling, and he’s leading. Will you follow? “The Lord is my shepherd. . . He leadeth me beside still waters.” And so, the “so-

what” of the “so-what” is that the Lord is not only with us always, but the Lord is leading us. We simply need the faith and the courage to follow where he leads.

I have recently read how God wants nothing more than for his people to be happy; but, how often we think we know better than God what will make us happy. The article went on to tell of an actor who really wanted a part on the television show “Hill Street Blues.” He started this mind game – reciting over and over that he got a part on “Hill Street Blues.” Fifty times every evening, he would recite, “I got on Hill Street Blues. I got on Hill Street Blues.” One day, he ask his spiritual director, “Do you think this will work? Do you think that my believing that I got the part will actually help me get the part?” His spiritual director responded, “Instilling the belief that you get the part may get you the part; but what if you actually get the part, and then you get a call to take a major role in a feature film, and you are unable to take it because you are under a contract for a very minor part on Hill Street Blues? Perhaps you should put your trust in God rather than your own mind games.”

How often I have preached about prayer and commented that, all too often, we do way too much talking in our prayers and not enough listening. All too often, our prayers become wish lists. Now those wish lists are not always bad. I think it entirely appropriate to ask that God’s healing power might come to an ill loved one. I think it entirely appropriate to ask that God would bring peace to a troubled world. And, yes, I think it’s entirely appropriate to ask that God would lead us out of personal troubles, crises, or difficulties. I’m not sure it’s as appropriate for us to try and tell God exactly how God should do that leading or where it is that God should lead. The Good Shepherd is the leader, not us. We are being called, called by his voice, called to follow where he leads.

An so I say again, when we pray, we need to do less talking and more listening. We need to take more quiet time, time to listen, time to discern where God might be leading and follow that lead. Jesus said, “I AM the gate.” Jesus is saying, “This is the way. This is my way. This is the way out of the pen. Follow me.” But Jesus is the gate. Jesus is the way. How often do we think we know a better way. No, the gate doesn’t belong over there. It should be over here, that’s the way we will go. We are called to follow, not to direct the Shepherd.

But the “so-what” doesn’t end there; because Jesus goes on to explain that the Good Shepherd will lay down his life for his sheep. Now, yes, this is a predictor of Jesus’ death on the cross, his atonement for all God’s people; but it is also a statement that Jesus is our great protector. So the “so-what” isn’t just to follow the risen Christ. The “so-what” is also a promise that, when we follow, Christ will not only lead us but also protect us. Christ will keep us safely in his care. The hired hand will leave the sheep and run away when danger approaches. Who are our modern hired hands? They are not just evil people. They aren’t

necessarily even all human. I might suggest that the hired hands are everything we might chase after when we should be seeking to follow the risen Christ. Christ is our protector. Christ is our guardian. Christ is our guide. Thanks be to God.

Still, I cannot let this message go, without highlighting our last verse:

“I have other sheep that don’t belong to this sheep pen. I must lead them too. They will listen to my voice and there will be one flock, with one shepherd.” (John 10:16)

Other sheep that don’t belong to this sheep pen. . . Other sheep that may not be United Methodists. . . Other sheep that may not even be Christian. . . Other sheep that may not have any faith at all. . . Yes, friends, I do believe that Christ is the Savior of all people; and I do believe that all means all. Every human on this planet is created in the image of God. Every human on this planet is part of God’s divine family. And Christ came not just for the Jews, but also for the Greeks and the Romans, and the outcast, and the minorities. I have said on numerous occasions, “If Jesus was about anything, he was about inclusiveness.” If Jesus, a righteous Jewish man, will hold a blessed conversation with a Samaritan woman who has had five husbands and is currently living with someone who is not her husband, there is no limit to Jesus love. And I tell you, **THERE IS NO LIMIT TO JESUS LOVE.**

So, the “so-what” of the “so-what,” the “so-what” of Jesus promise to be with us always is the reassurance of his constant care and his call to follow where *he* leads, for it is in following him that we find our true happiness as one flock in the presence of the one Good Shepherd.

Let us pray. . .

Lord, give us the patience to listen,
and give us the faith, the courage, and the strength
to follow where you lead, every day of our lives.
Amen.

Rev. Mark L. Steiger, Pastor
North Olmsted United Methodist Church