

John 10:11-18

Easter 4; April 22 & 23, 2018

There was once a man who netted three trout from a mountain stream. He carefully laid them side-by-side on a thick patch of grass. Before he removed them from the water, they were so full of life. After he netted them, it was a different story. As they lay on the grass, they were so motionless. They gasped for air. They looked so unhappy. So, he talked to them, hoping his encouragement would change them. *“Little fish, don’t be sad. You’ll like the grass. Just try it out for a while.”* No response. His neighbor walked by. *“Hey, George! Come and check out these fish!”* The first man said to his neighbor: *“I’m sure they could prosper here on the grass. Don’t you agree?”* After all, they both liked the grass. Still the fish looked so unhappy.

Finally, a little boy came walking by and saw how unhappy the fish lying on the grass looked. He exclaimed: *“What are you doing? Put them back. Fish were created to be in the water.”* At that moment, the man realized that even if he could have convinced the fish to like the grass, they would never prosper. Fish were meant to be in water. In the same way, sheep are meant to be led by a Shepherd. Our direction in life is to follow our Good Shepherd wherever he might lead us.

Yet, why is it so hard for many people to find direction and purpose in their life? We search for purpose and meaning in so many different things. We search for purpose in our jobs. We want to make a difference by our work. We search for purpose in our children and their successes. We use social media to paint a picture of how we look to others. All the time hoping for a simple purpose: We want people to like us. Outwardly, we look like we are doing well. But inside we find ourselves like sheep lacking purpose and direction in our life.

In the chapter before our text, Jesus uses a man who was blind to teach his disciples and us a lesson in following our Good Shepherd. As Jesus and his disciples were walking along, they came across a man who had been blind from birth. They asked Jesus a simple question: **“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”** (John 9:2) The answer to that question is nothing short of amazing. You see, our text today, is part of the answer to that question of the disciples. Jesus answers his disciples’ question. This man’s parents didn’t sin. This man did not sin to cause his blindness. His blindness wasn’t the result of God punishing him. This man was born blind for one simple reason: **“but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.”** This man had been born blind for this one moment. Jesus was about to display just how good the Good Shepherd really is. Jesus not only wanted to heal him physically by opening his eyes to see, but he also wanted him to see spiritually so that he would follow the Good Shepherd.

I can hardly imagine what it must have been like for this man to see for the first time in his life. He had only ever known darkness. Now he could see the color of the sky. He could see light. He could see the faces of his family. He could see his hands and feet. He could see all things that he had only heard and felt. But Jesus also wanted him to see the face and heart of a Savior who loved him dearly.

What was the reaction of the spiritual shepherds of Jesus’ day? The Pharisees began to investigate this healing. They wanted to know who did this. They even accused him of not being blind at all. They didn’t want to hear that Jesus had healed this man. So finally, they just simply threw the man out of the temple. John then tells us: **“Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” “Who is he, sir?” the man asked. “Tell me so that I may believe in him.” Jesus said, “You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.” Then the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.”**

As Jesus is addressing the Pharisees, he says to them: **“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”** Sheep need a Shepherd to lead them. He is telling the Pharisees that they may think that they are spiritual shepherds of the people. They are not. Only Jesus is truly **THE GOOD SHEPHERD**. He is the only Shepherd to lead the sheep. He is the only one that the sheep will follow as well.

How do we know that this Shepherd will stop at nothing to protect his sheep? Jesus says: **“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life**

for the sheep.” Here is a simple illustration to show the kind of love that the Good Shepherd has for the sheep. Two brothers were playing on the sandbanks by the river. One ran after another up a large mound of sand. Unfortunately, the mound was not solid, and their weight caused them to sink in quickly. When the boys did not return home for dinner, the family and neighbors organized a search. They found the younger brother unconscious, with his head and shoulders sticking out above the sand. When they cleared the sand to his waist, he awakened. The searchers asked, "Where is your brother?" The child replied, "I'm standing on his shoulders." With the sacrifice of his own life, the older brother lifted the younger to safety. As the younger brother saw the love of his older brother, sheep see the love of their Good Shepherd.

That's what our Good Shepherd, Jesus, has done for us. He did what we could never do. He gave his life for the sheep. I am not an expert on sheep. But from what I have read, the bond between the shepherd and sheep is a bond like none other. The bond is so deep that the sheep can tell the difference in the voice of the shepherd and the voice of someone else. When they hear the voice of their shepherd, they come. No matter what you have done, your Shepherd has died for your sins. Our Good Shepherd tells us what that means for us not just in eternity, but today as well. Jesus says: **"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."** Our Good Shepherd gives us life – life to the full.

So, what is our purpose in life? It really is very simple – to get from this life to the next. That's what our Good Shepherd promises to do for us. He promises to guide, guard you and watch over you. He knows you by name. He knows exactly what is going on in your life, and he knows exactly the path he needs to lead you through to get you to the green pastures. He is our Good Shepherd. We are sheep that need our Good Shepherd. Amen.