

The King of Love My Good Shepherd Is

Vicar Albrecht—Good Shepherd Sunday (April 25th)—Psalm 23

Give thanks to the LORD for he is good; his love endures forever. Amen.

If I were in charge, then things would be different. If I had my way things would be better.

Have you ever heard someone talk like this? Insinuating that they could do a better job. The funny thing is: you never hear these types of things said when the person who really is in charge is in the room. Sure it is easy to criticize the President, the head coach, the officials, the teacher, the boss, or even mom & dad—really whomever—until they come into the room. Then, when they are within earshot, we no longer exude the confidence we once did.

Today is Good Shepherd Sunday, a special Sunday after Easter when we focus especially on the work of the Christ, the leadership of Jesus, for us members of the holy flock. And on this Sunday not only do we examine what Christ has done for us as the King of Love, nor just what he is doing for us now, but also what our role in the kingdom of God is. A sheep. Not really very glamorous. Not really very exciting. Because don't we think we could do better? We are more intelligent, more skilled, too-talented to languish away as a dopey sheep.

So, we contemplate all the things we think we could accomplish if we were only given the chance. If only we had the opportunity—then we would really show people our talents. As our hearts well up with self-confidence we begin to stray from the leadership of the Good Shepherd. Thinking, *well if I were only given a chance to make some choices for myself I would really start accomplishing things.*

Because as we look around ourselves, all we see is the plush pastures and the calm waters that our Good Shepherd has led us to. We convince ourselves that it can't be that hard to find enough to eat or to drink. That the work of the Good Shepherd is easy, and maybe even unnecessary for, us, experienced sheep.

So we wander away from the leadership of our Good Shepherd. Looking for our own green pastures. Convinced that where Christ has led us isn't comfortable enough for us to really stretch out—that the grass really is greener on the other side. So we wander from church to church—looking for what sounds good, what we are comfortable with. Or we wander from group to group, waiting to find others who won't judge our pet-sins, somewhere we can stretch out and let our hair down. Because we think we could do better—we think we could choose better leaders. Maybe we want a place where we can be in charge—where they will listen to our ideas, follow our directions. Somewhere where we have more control over the ministry. Maybe we question those whom the Good Shepherd has put in charge.

And as we wander away we begin to drink different waters. Because the waters the Good Shepherd directed us to aren't calm enough, sweet enough. We chase waters that we think are calmer, sweeter. Maybe the waters we fill ourselves with are the gossip around the water cooler—whether that be at work, on the phone, or on the internet.

All because we have better ideas. We are convinced that the Good Shepherd is really just the King of Control, only looking to have authority over us—and we aren't interested in that. We want to be free sheep, independent lambs. So we despise the meal he has set before us. Avoiding the banquet table he has prepared us because we think it is just his way of getting us to do what he wants. Maybe we reluctantly find a chair in church, dragging ourselves here in the morning—all the while making a point to make it home in time for our favorite TV show. Indulging our appetites with lewd behavior, foul-language and then comforting ourselves with the idea that *well I'll read a little bit of the Bible before I go to bed.* Maybe we have survived on spiritual fast-food. Just a quick passage here or there when we are really craving some comfort, forgiveness, or love. All the while looking for something else to eat, searching for what we think the King of Love has been hiding from us this whole time—just like Adam and Eve. In doing so, we spurn the anointing oil, rejecting the overflowing cup that he offers us, because it isn't what we want, it isn't what we found.

Our petulant arrogance has caused us to stray far from the arms of our loving Good Shepherd, seeking to satisfy our carnal, selfish, and arrogant urges. We have led ourselves astray. Because we preferred to find our own way, our own pastures, our own waters. We walked away from our King of Love, our Good Shepherd, who offered it all to us, because we wanted to find something better for ourselves.

And instead we followed bad advice, and found the company of evil. It surrounded us. Here we were trapped on every side, unable to defend ourselves, because what could a sheep do?

As evil encircled us, as the shadows of death loomed overhead all looked lost—we were lost; because our life-map was misleading—all because we were looking for something else, something better, something of our own.

But our Good Shepherd was looking too. Looking for his lost sheep. For you and for me. He saw us as we joined in with others who hated his pastures—despised his banquet table. He heard us mock him when we thought he wasn't around. He knows of our sinful attempts to satisfy our carnal, selfish urges. But he didn't turn his back on us. Our spurned Shepherd did not treat us as we have treated him time and time again—with hatred, and disdain. But instead our Good Shepherd sought us with vigor and enthusiasm—searching us out while we were lost. Remember our Good Shepherd is the King of Love. He doesn't want us to merely survive with spiritual fast-food. He wants you and me—his sheep—to thrive. To be able to stretch out and relax in peace in plush pastures and calm waters.

And so he wields his rod to separate us from the danger we got found ourselves in. Using his staff to draw us closer to himself. Using his powerful out-stretched arms to lift us upon his back and carry us to safety—to the green pastures and calm waters we should have been in. But, this whole search was not without its price. Our Good Shepherd laid down his life for wandering sheep—for you and for me, for all of us sheep who wanted nothing to do with his leadership, with his authority. Because our Good Shepherd really is the King of Love.

Whether or not we recognize his authority—and by nature we didn't—Christ recognized his responsibility as our Good Shepherd, to lay down his life for his sheep so that they in turn might be spared. To receive the crown of thorns upon his head, with blood dripping down so that we might in turn have our heads anointed with oil, dripping down, separating us—calling us out to be members of his holy flock. He drank the cup the Father placed before him so that we might receive a cup overflowing with the forgiveness of sins.

But the job of the Shepherd is so much more than to simply die for his sheep. What did Jesus tell Peter the job of the Shepherd was? Feed my sheep! And the King of Love, our Good Shepherd, certainly excels at this.

He shepherds us lovingly, guiding us safely to the green pastures of his Word, where he feeds and nourishes us with his Gospel promises of his love and his forgiveness. Our Good Shepherd has led us to the calm waters of his love, and caused us to drink, filling us richly with his love.

And while feeding his sheep, the Good Shepherd has his eye looking for danger. Warning his sheep of the forces of evil wishing to devour a wandering lamb. Reminding us of the places we have faltered before—not to shame us, but to protect us from doing it again.

And even as enemies approach, even as the shadows of death grow long and cold, our Good Shepherd reminds us that we don't need to fear any of those. Just as he defeated our enemies when he rescued us from the sinful world, and the devil—the King of Love still has all power and authority over them now. The Good Shepherd laid down his life for his sheep so that they need not fear death anymore. Because death, which once meant the end of a sheep, is now the gateway to the feast prepared for us.

You see even as the evil enemies nip at our heels, our Good Shepherd overtakes them—his goodness and his merciful love are always with us until the end of our days. Because our Good Shepherd will lovingly take us one day to be with his Father—in his home—where we will live forever in peace and love. This is why it is good to be a sheep, even though we don't get to take any credit for finding the green pastures we stretch out in, even though we don't get to take any credit for the cool and calm waters we drink, or defeating our enemies, or even setting the banquet table before us—we still get to eat, drink, and relax in the house of the LORD. Yeah, we don't get to be the Good Shepherd. We don't get to make all the decisions—but we do get to reap all the rewards. We get to enjoy every moment of it. It's not too bad to be a sheep, when the King of Love is your personal Good Shepherd. AMEN.

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy - to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forever more! Amen. [Jude 24-25]