

John 10:1-21      Ez 34:1-6, 11-16, 22-24

Over the past four weeks of Lent we have been looking at various scriptures where we have been invited to Follow Jesus.

As we have “Followed” Jesus we have encountered different symbols to remind us of the journey that we have been on. Throughout our sanctuary we have placed reminders of these scriptural symbols.

Week one; we read from Matthew’s gospel, chapter 4 versus 1-11. We examined the story of Satan tempting Jesus in the desert. We use stones drawn on the ground to remind us of the temptation to turn stones into bread. ***We are reminded that Jesus understands the temptations of the world and that he provides us with the guidance we need to resist those temptations through the scriptures.***

Week two we read from John chapter 3. We heard how Nicodemus approached Jesus in the darkness of the night. Jesus explained to him what it means to be born again. The darkness reminds us of Nicodemus and ***“That God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that who so ever believes in Him shall have eternal life.”***

Week three – John chapter 4. The story of the Samaritan women at the well. Water is our image reminding us that Jesus proclaimed ***“The water I give is like a flowing fountain that gives eternal life.”***

Last week; John chapter 6, the story of Jesus feeding 5000 men with 5 loaves of bread and two fish. The fish in the stream and the fish banks remind us that ***if we follow Jesus, He will provide for all of our needs.***

Today we look at John chapter 10.

To understand John chapter 10 you need to understand that it is a continuation of the story in John chapter 9. Jesus has given sight to a man blind since birth. After several encounters with the Pharisees and their disbelief in how the man gained his sight, he is kicked out of the church. When Jesus hears about this he finds the man and reveals who he really is. He explains that he has come to give sight to the blind and that those who do not understand are, truly the blind. The Pharisees who hear this do not understand. Jesus tries to explain it, but it is just not sinking in, so the story moves to Chapter 10 where Jesus tries a different approach.

I invite each of you to take out your bibles or if you do not have one to open one of the pew bibles and follow along as we will look at the scripture several times. You can find the lesson on page # \_\_\_\_\_. John chapter 10: versus 1-21. Listen for these are the words of the Lord.

READ THE SCRIPTURE

From these verses there are four parts to highlight. First we will look at verses 3-5. We read that the sheep hear the shepherds' voice and recognize it. The shepherd knows his sheep and calls each by name. He recognizes them just as they recognize him. He leads them from the pen and they follow where he leads.

Have you ever wondered why the bible is so full of sheep stories? All through the Old Testament and even into the gospels we repeatedly hear about sheep and shepherds. The reason is that raising sheep and being a shepherd were some of the prime professions and wealth of the time. If you were to rewrite the scriptures today stories of sheep and shepherds probably just would not have the same impact.

Today's scripture gives us a very accurate lesson on sheep farming. The shepherds knew their sheep and the sheep the shepherd, by day the shepherds led the sheep into the pastures and by night back to a common pen where several flocks would be protected and guarded by a night watchman. Jesus tells us that he is like the shepherd, he knows his sheep and they know him. He leads and they follow. The watchman recognizes him and lets him in.

In verses 8 and 11-13 we see that the true shepherd will also lay down his life for his sheep. False shepherds are thieves and robbers. Today's first scripture starts by describing the kings and leaders as the shepherds of the people, but it goes on to say that they were bad shepherds and did not care for the sheep, only their own wellbeing. God says that they cannot even be called shepherds based on how they have acted. Because of their lack of shepherding skills the people have become lost and scattered.

Jesus proclaims that He is the Good Shepherd. He not only will lead his sheep, but he will also lay down his life for them. He says that all who came before him were thieves and robbers. He says that the hired hand will run at any sign of trouble, but the Good Shepherd is true and will die to protect his flock.

The third thing we can learn about the Good Shepherd is that he does not come to steal, kill, or destroy, but to provide life for the sheep. He does not just lead them

to the pasture, but to the best pasture, where not only can they find life, but find abundant life. A life full of nourishment and growth.

The Good Shepherd hears and knows his sheep, he leads them and they follow, and he provides an abundant life for them.

Not bad, but can we relate it to anything in our society today?

Twenty five years ago this week, my life was dramatically changed forever. I cannot say that I became a good shepherd, or even a shepherd at all but I became a father, which for me is the closest thing I can imagine to being a shepherd. Being a parent is something that cannot be compared to anything else in life. From the moment you hear that first cry and see that little bundle of flesh and bones your life is changed forever. I would not trade it for anything else I have done in life or might have done. You learn to recognize that cry from the crib in the night, to the shop in the mall three stores away, to the nursery down the hall during worship. And the source of that cry, it recognizes its parents too. Sometimes they are the only ones who can calm them.

And no matter how old they become or how much less you see them when they grow up, you will always recognize that voice, not only here (ears), but in here (heart).

And for most parents it is just like the Good Shepard and his sheep, as that child grows you will do anything to protect them from harm, whether it is emotional, physical, or spiritual. When they suffer, you suffer, when they feel pain, you feel pain. And no matter what sacrifices it might take your goal is to provide them with an abundant life. Not just one of material things, but one of love and nurture. You hope and dream that they will always be safe and happy.

Just like the good shepherd, you hear and recognize those voices, you protect them from harm always willing to sacrifice yourself first if necessary, and you provide for them so that they might have an abundant life.

The fourth highlight we want to look at in the scripture is from verses 14-18. Jesus proclaims that not only does the Shepherd have the sheep that are in the pen, but he has other sheep not in the fold. He goes on to say that he must bring them into the fold so that all of the sheep are together. God's grace is not just for the found, but also for the lost, the lonely, the suffering, Jesus declares that his life is his own to give. It is given of his own accord, not of anyone else's choosing and that his life is given so that all may share in God's grace.

So the Shepherd;

***Recognizes, protects, provides and seeks.*** What does that mean for us? Are we the sheep or are we the shepherds. During this lent season we are invited to follow Jesus, but what does that really mean for us here at Allison Creek? Is it any different today than it was 157 years ago?

When Cindy and I joined this church one of the reasons we did was because we felt so welcome. Everyone was friendly, caring and loving. You all seemed genuinely glad to have us. Maybe it was just fresh blood?

Since we have been here, others have joined too. Many times I hear for the same reasons, The ACPC is a warm friendly welcoming body of Christ. Yet at the same time we have seen others leave. Some newer members and some older ones. So you would have to ask, if we are such a warm and friendly church, why we are not bursting at the seams. Why do we not have to worry about where everyone will sit on Sunday morning? Well I will tell you, there are a lot of warm and friendly churches out there. I admit, probably not all of them, but certainly if they are of a true Christian nature you would think that most of them would be; right? So what

does that tell you about us? It says that being warm and friendly is not enough. This lenton season is teaching us that we need to be like Jesus. We need to follow his lead. We need to be the shepherds, not the sheep.

Our Lord calls us to Bear Witness to his love and sacrifice. To his Grace and salvation. Earlier this week we lost one of our Shepherds. Dale Conrad. Many of you were here on Wednesday for a remembrance service for Dale. There were plenty of stories and laughter shared. Stories of Dale as a bus driver, as a grill master, in the military, as a neighbor and as a friend and a loving husband. I did not know Dale for as long as many of you or in many of those other roles, but what I can tell you about Dale is that he had a love for the Lord and he lived a life that displayed that love openly. Dale was a good shepherd and an example to us all.

We are all called to Bear Witness to God's Grace in our community, not just through our character and our actions, but through our proclamations as well. Dale understood that; now it is time for the rest of us.

God has filled this church and this community with his sheep and with his shepherds, however we fail ourselves and we fail God if we avoid our responsibilities to share the importance of the Gospel to our lives.

Does our Faith really mean anything?

Does claiming Christ as our Lord and Savior make a real difference in our daily lives?

Do we believe that our faith is really Good News?

If so.... then what is holding us back?

Proclaim the News of Salvation;

Bear Witness to God's Grace.

Come and Follow Jesus.

Lead the lost and the lonely sheep to our flock.

Repeatedly studies have shown that most people who attend a church for the first time come because someone invited them to come with them. Over the next two weeks there will be a variety of programs and worship opportunities here at ACPC. I challenge each of you to find someone to invite to attend a service with you

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen

Let us pray.