

# THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Sermon material by The Rev. Dr. Ralph W. Bayfield 5/3/2020  
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A Priest of a suburban parish was speaking to the Sunday school children. He told them that he as the minister was like a shepherd and the members of the congregation were the sheep. He then asked the question: “What does the shepherd do for the sheep?” A little fellow in the front row raised his hand and answered, “He fleeces them.”

I certainly hoped people don’t think that minister’s fleeced the people of the congregations they serve! I had a teacher, who whenever someone took advantage of him, used to say, “I’ve been fleeced!” I always thought the word had a derogative, negative meaning, like: “Someone was cheated. He was ripped off. Something was stolen from him.”

Later I learned the origin of the word fleece came from the caring of sheep. Fleecing is the process of cutting the wool from the sheep for positive use in making clothing, or blankets or any number of things. Fleecing is a process of separating something from another thing.

Webster says the word *fleece* has several meanings, among them are “to strip property from a person,” “a heraldic depiction of the fleece of a ram suspended by a belt among its middle,”(The Brooks Brothers logo), “the booty of a fleecing of a victim,” and “the process of separating the wool from the sheep.”<sup>1</sup>

True, shepherds go into the business for the purpose of feeding and fleecing the sheep. When the Bible speaks of the ordained leaders of God’s

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<sup>1</sup> Webster’s Third New International Dictionary, *Volume 1 A-G; fleece*; Chicago, 1986 pg.868

people as shepherds, it envisions leaders who spiritually, feed protect and feel for people as a good shepherd does for the sheep of his flock. The Sermon is about abundance, and the minister's of the church, Lay and Ordained who love the people of the church as the shepherd loves the sheep of his flock.

Today's teaching from Jesus is also about abundance. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. He is the gate to abundant pasture, to life,- to all that we need.

What can this mean for us today? Consider the story:

A bishop on her sabbatical chose to live among the homeless poor. One day being hungry she remembered a church with a sign outside that said simply, *FOOD*. However, when she went inside, she realized the church was selling food to benefit the homeless, the food was not free, sorry.

Um, there's something very wrong here. A homeless person, hungry, and needy is refused the food that's being sold for an outreach program to people like herself.

It's one thing to be willing to sponsor programs that will give something to the poor or donate a few bucks. It's totally different to sit down next to someone who has spent the night on the filthy streets, and who may not have had a bath for a few days. It's something to experience the table manners of the desperately hungry poor, share the same food and actually spend time speaking to them.

What do we think about when we see someone homeless and in need. They may be just a bit scary, or a person who may make us feel uncomfortable? Are we willing to sacrifice to include them? We read in our

lesson from Acts 2 today that believers “had all things in common”- that they would sell their own goods to buy for any who were in need.

Today on TV, I saw people reaching out to the unemployed and homeless. Outside a Washington Church, a D.C. Council member was working with a group of masked volunteers. They were handing out bags of food, tomatoes, apples, pasta, cans of black beans and personal items like toilet paper. The Councilman said, “Unfortunately he was accustomed to the gun violence that had long defined his neighborhood, but today they are facing a terrifying almost incomprehensible monster, the covoid-19 panda. He noted that the death rate in Ward 8 rose from 259 to 677 from mid April to the months end. He listed diabetes, high blood pressure, asthma, suicide, homicide, drug addiction, unemployment and violent crime as contributing factors to the death rate. But by far the largest cause of death was covoid-19. In spite of their huge problems, someone painted a huge word on a closed glass storefront - HOPE

Many people in our churches have for years reached out to the needy. But the coronovirus has added a new deeper layer of pain and suffering. Not only the threat of sickness and death, but the closing of businesses and jobs all across the country, not to mention the world. The big issue today is whether to continue to close down and beat the virus. Or should we open the doors for people to return to work, If we do so, will the virus return to even greater numbers of sickness and death than before. We need thoughtful, prayerful leadership. If there is not some way for people to pay their rent and have food on the table, there could be a rebellion. People are desperate. We need to pray diligently for our government leaders, for wise leadership. We need to pray for ourselves to be bearers of hope.

I know that many church people have been reaching out to others in response to Jesus' teaching on abundance.

Its ironic that Jesus in todays reading has not yet called Himself the Good Shepherd. That comes next year in the liturgical calendar. This year Jesus uses the story of the "Gatekeeper" as an analogy for Himself. When the disciples didn't understand what he was saying, he comes right out and identifies Himself as the "Gatekeeper" of the sheep. In other words He is the keeper of "the people of God," thats all of us. You and me! Jesus controls the entrance to new life. He says, "I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture....I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." Jesus came into the world to give us the hope of salvation and exciting eternal life!

Let us give thanks for our health and let us reach out in whatever way we can to provide comfort and hope to our brothers and sisters. Let us give thanks for the many blessings God has bestowed upon us. AMEN.

#### FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

O God, whose Son Jesus Christ is the good shepherd of your people: Grant that when we hear his voice we may know him who calls each by name, and follow where he leads; who, with you and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

*A Reading (Lesson) from the Acts of the Apostles (1:42-47)*

They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

*The Word of the Lord.*

*A Reading (Lesson) from the First Letter of Peter (2:19-25)*

It is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly, If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

*The Word of the Lord.*

*+The Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ According to John (10:1-10)*

Jesus said, "Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of "strangers." Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. So again Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who come before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." *The Gospel of the Lord.*

*PSALM 23 Dominus regit. me*

- 1 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
- 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures  
and leads me beside still waters.
- 3 He revives my soul and  
guides me along right pathways for his Name's sake.
- 4 Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I shall fear no evil; for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff, they comfort me;
- 5 You spread a table before me in the presence of those  
who trouble me;  
you have anointed my head with oil,  
and my cup is running over.
- 6 Surely your goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days  
of my life,  
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.