

Good Shepherd Sunday !

“I am the good shepherd.” said Jesus

“The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”

In our Second Reading this morning - **I John 3:16-24** - we hear about the gift God gives us:

“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.”

That says it all!

Now, if I were **wise** and you were **lucky**, I'd say “Amen” and get out of the pulpit right now. But I guess I'm not that wise and you are not that lucky because I want to look with you at that **“hired hand”** of whom Jesus spoke.

“The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming - and leaves the sheep - and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.”

There is the real danger of deception. It lies in confusing that hired hand with the true Shepherd. There are always false shepherds in this world. Sometimes they look really good. We can be fooled.

The wise essayist & early television comedian **Fred Allen** once noted the deception that is ever before us. He gave an example from his world:

“A celebrity is a person who works all his life to become well known - and then wears dark glasses **to appear to avoid recognition”**

There is a clear example of the danger in relying on the hired hand - (a Shepherd in dark glasses) - especially when he or she tries to appear to be a Good Shepherd ... with the “hidden agenda” of his own comfort and safety.

Now there is a related truth that takes us deeper. Our former Presiding Bishop, Katherine Jefferts-Schori once came to this diocese in a time of confusion of leadership. She was asked

about the problem of hypocrisy in the religious world. Her thoughtful response began with a clear statement of truth: "**We are all hypocrites at one point or another!**"

That's true ... and we all cause problems.

The "I-Thou" existentialist, Martin Buber, believed that all human created problems stem from one dual source:

- (1) We do not **say** what we **mean** ... and then
- (2) We do not **do** what we **say**.

Jesus said, "**I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.**"

That is precisely what he did, having "**set his face for Jerusalem**". That was the beginning of the eventful journey that led directly to the Crucifixion on Calvary. Along the way, Jesus met a number of curious people and events - and we only know the ones that were recorded.

Jesus - being "*fully human*" - must have wondered at times "**Does my Heavenly Father really love this one?**" (We know his disciples wondered.) But Jesus stayed on mission - faithfully, patiently - and to some - incredibly. He stayed on the mission of our "Good Shepherd" ... **a mission set by decision** - for all of us sheep in desperate need of relationship with our God.

As Jesus stated in our Gospel this morning, "**No one takes my life - I give it.**"

No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father."

That is the Good Shepherd in the decision and truth of his Mission.

Years ago this diocese had a wise Assisting Bishop named **Brooke Mosley**. He preached a sermon one Confirmation Sunday at Trinity, Solebury. He told the Confirmands he wanted them to keep thinking about a truth. He said, "**Because of Jesus Christ, we know that love is not just a good feeling. Real love is a decision from which later good feelings**"

may flow.”

It's a decision that puts one under the **Reign of God**. When we see it for ourselves we are touched by God's Holy Spirit - and we are changed.

Not long ago the *Cincinnati Enquirer* recounted such a moment. It occurred in the waning and failing days of the once great **Babe Ruth**. Before his home run record (714 in one season) was displaced by **Hank Aaron** ... and then again later by **Barry Bonds**, Ruth was the "Home Run King" - the "Sultan of Swat". (He was also the leader in strike-outs, but who cared to remember that?) In the 30's - he was striking out more than he was hitting. Many former fans had moved on to other heroes. He struck out one more time in Cincinnati. **George Herman Ruth**, head down on his chest, trudged toward the dug-out amid the mounting thunder of boos and jeers from the crowd. The noise began to lessened as more people noticed a little boy running across the field - from the stands - toward Ruth. The small boy reached his idol and spontaneously threw his arms around his big leg. Babe Ruth always had a big heart for kids. He dropped the bat, bent over, lifted up the boy and held him in a hug as together they continued in tears to the dugout. The crowd became quiet.

“And a little child shall lead them.”

Real love comes from inside. It will transcend danger and heartache of the moment.

Jesus Christ is the "Good Shepherd" who goes to the Cross by decision. He would rather die in this world than betray our God ... or you or me - and our trust. Jesus Christ is raised by God for us all - as we celebrate in this victorious season of Easter - that we too might be raised from death of body, mind and spirit. Because of that faith, we still say with King David of long ago, **“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.”**

Amen