

The Moment that Changed our Lives

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St. David's Episcopal Church, Wayne, PA
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Easter 4, Year B, Good Shepherd

John 10:11-18

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

Lately, I have been reflecting a lot on major life events. Those events that change your life forever. I'm not talking about that one time you went to a Phillies game, the first time you went to the Jersey Shore, or your first trip to Minella's Diner. I'm talking about those joyous occasions like marriage, the birth of a child, or the first time you walked into St. David's. I'm also talking about those devastating moments, the death of a loved one or a poor medical diagnosis. We all have them. They are moments in time that have deeply impacted our lives, so much so that they will never be the same.

Personally, I just experienced the greatest moment of my life. As many of you know, my son, Zion Michael Szczerba was born on April 2nd. There is nothing like it. The true miracle of birth is proof of God's existence here on earth. Because as soon as Zion was born, and I heard those cries and saw that face, I knew that I loved him. In that moment, those few minutes, I knew that my life was different. I knew that Marissa and I were now responsible for this little 8 lbs 12 oz baby boy. Our family had been changed for the better.

We have these moments in our lives and sometimes one feels more impactful than the last, but no matter how they play themselves out our lives are changed. Four years ago, when Marissa and I got married, I thought that was the greatest moment of my life. Yet, Zion's birth trumped it. Because out of our love came him. Now, with our little man two and half weeks old, we are still adjusting to this new life. We continue to learn and grow as a family that has been made greater because of his birth.

As Christians, the event that changed everything for us was the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the single most important thing for our lives as followers of Christ. Because of Easter Day, we are equipped with hope. We have hope in the resurrection and the new life that God showed us. The day that Jesus' disciples found the stone to his tomb rolled over and the tomb empty with no body, was the catalyst for all Christians to live a changed life. As the hymn says, "death is conquered, we are free, Christ has won the victory." Life has not ended at death but continues with God. There is victory over the grave.

Because of Easter Day, we have a Good Shepherd. The image of a shepherd is seen throughout the Bible. Most notably, the Scriptures speak of God as the shepherd of Israel in a number of Old Testament passages, such as the one we read today, Psalm 23. Then comes the great reading from the Gospel of John. Every year on the Fourth Sunday of Easter, we read from the 10th Chapter of John because the day is traditionally known as Good Shepherd Sunday. We hear how Jesus told his disciples that he was the Good Shepherd and that he was the one who would lead them into green pastures and he was the one to lay his life down for them.

Jesus was making it clear that he would be the one to guide them and protect them if they followed him. Jesus was the one who would lay down his life for theirs. In the days of Jesus, a Good Shepherd's sole interest was to protect the sheep of his or her pasture and keep them together as a community. In today's Gospel reading, Jesus speaks a parable: he is the Good Shepherd who wants to be in an indestructible relationship with his flock of sheep. As a shepherd, Jesus knows his sheep and they know him. The relationship is so strong that the shepherd will not abandon them. They know that the shepherd has their best interest at heart and the sheep will follow his lead.

In the first ten verses of this chapter of John, that we didn't read this morning, Jesus compares himself to the gate for his sheep. At night, when the sheep were all safely gathered in the fold, a good shepherd would lay down in the gate to be on guard against any predators who tried to enter. Then in the morning the shepherd at the gate would keep watch as the sheep passed by. Thus, whoever enters through Jesus, through the gate, will be saved. They will be able to come out and go in and find pasture. They will not be deceived by a thief who comes to steal and destroy. They will know that their shepherd is the one to lead them as a flock.

On Good Friday, when our Good Shepherd laid down his life for his flock, we reaped the benefits. We were rewarded because of this sacrificial action of our shepherd. Then on Easter Day, we were shown that although our earthly pilgrimages will end, we will have more life with God, thanks to the sacrifice of our shepherd. The gate will be opened for us, he will call us by name and there will be green pastures in front of us.

This summer will be the ninth anniversary of another moment in my life that changed things forever. That moment would be the death of my mom after her battle with cancer. It's impossible not to think about it, especially after the birth of my son. God changed my life for the better when Zion was born, and yet nine years later I can't help but think about my mom. She would have loved to be here to love and spoil her grandchild.

We remember and cherish those joyous moments that change our lives. We can't help but remember and mourn those sad moments as well. However, what makes those sad moments somewhat bearable is to remember Easter Day. Because that changed it all. It gave us hope that although our loved ones have died, there is still resurrection. It gave us hope that although disease and cancer are out there, that we might be healed. It gave us hope that although we may be suffering, the good shepherd will lead us into greener pastures.

Life is difficult. There is celebration and destruction all around us. Yet, we have hope. The death of my mom was easily the worst thing that had ever happened to me. As I said, I can't help but think about her every day, especially during this joyous time in my family's life. Being Christian doesn't exempt us from having these bad moments take place in our lives. But being Christian gives me hope that my mom is enjoying the heavenly banquet right now because the Good Shepherd laid down his life for us.

I was recently gifted a book entitled, "Psalms for Young Children", written by Marie-Helene Delval. This book is for my son, however, as I was preparing for today I couldn't help but open the book and begin reading. On the inside cover, it describes the contents of the book by saying, "The biblical psalms describe a whole range of emotions, from joy and wonder to sadness and regret. This collection of Psalms, paraphrased for young readers, uses simple yet powerful imagery to help children express their feelings."

I was captivated by their interpretation of Psalm 23, a familiar one to all of us. It reads, "God is my shepherd. He leads me in the right direction. And even if I have to walk in a dark place, I am not scared. I know nothing will hurt me if I walk with God!" We all have had dark

moments in our lives, but when we walk with the Good Shepherd we walk a life of resurrection. He guides us and leads us, and lays down his life for us.

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