

GOOD SHEPHERD SUNDAY– APRIL 25, 28 & 29, 2007
St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI

Our Good Shepherd Cares For His Sheep John 21:15-23

When a baby cries and screams that may be a sign to its parents that she is hungry and wants to be fed or her diapers are messy and she needs to be changed. Even though babies cannot speak they are able to communicate their needs and wants to their parents. Every one of us has different needs as we go through life. At times we need someone to take care of us. When we are infants we have lots of needs that we need someone to help us with because we can't take care of ourselves. As we grow up we have different needs. When we grow old there may come a time when we need more help again. We don't have the physical and sometimes the mental strength to do what we once were capable of doing.

Today is Good Shepherd Sunday, the fourth Sunday of Easter. In the Word of God before us we see how **OUR GOOD SHEPHERD CARES FOR HIS SHEEP. I) He Forgives and Restores Us and II) He Keeps Us Focused.**

OUR GOOD SHEPHERD FORGIVES AND RESTORES US

One of the greatest needs that each of us has is the need to be secure and safe. We have the need to be accepted and forgiven. There is the need to be relieved of guilt and shame over things that we have said and done wrong and also for all the good that we fail to do.

The Apostle Peter had such a need just as you and I do. In our reading which occurred after Jesus' resurrection from the dead the Savior appeared to the eleven by the Sea of Galilee. The disciples had been out fishing and when they came in Jesus had breakfast with them. After breakfast, Jesus asked Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" (v15a) This question may have brought back to Peter's mind the statement he had made to Jesus in the upper room several weeks prior just before Jesus was arrested and executed. Remember, Jesus had warned Peter that before the rooster crows you will disown me three times. Remember Peter's response? "Even if all fall away, I will not." (Mark 14:29) Now listen to Peter's response, "Yes, Lord, you know that I like you." Peter defers to the fact that he knows that Jesus knows all things and so he says, "You know". Then Peter does not use the same word that Jesus uses for love. He uses a word that basically means – "I like you. I enjoy being in your company." Jesus then tells him, "Feed my lambs." (v. 15c) But Jesus isn't done with Peter. He asks him a second time, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me" (v. 16a) Peter replies again in the same way he did before, "Yes, Lord, you know that I like you." (v. 16b) Jesus says, "Take care of my sheep." (v. 16c) Now comes the third time. This time Jesus uses the same word that Peter has been using. He says to Peter, "Simon son of John, do you like me?" (v. 17a) This time Peter is saddened and distressed by Jesus' question. But again Peter replies, "Lord, you know all things, you have come to know that I like you." (v. 17b) Jesus again replies, "Feed my sheep." (v. 17c) Why did Jesus question Peter three times? Wasn't once enough? Jesus is recalling for Peter the events in the courtyard of the High Priest while Jesus was on trial before the Jews. Remember those servants who questioned Peter three times whether he was one of the followers of Jesus. Three times he denied that he even knew who Jesus was. Now Jesus questions Peter and asks him if he really does love him. Notice the boldness and self-confidence of Peter is not there any more. He recognizes that he has fallen. He thought that he was so strong that he would never deny Jesus. Yet Jesus knew that Peter would and he warned Peter, but Peter relied on himself and his own abilities and claimed that everyone else might desert Jesus and betray him, but he never would.

It is easy for each of us to become self-reliant and think I would never do that. I would never cheat on my spouse. How despicable. How could someone do that? I would never fall into an addiction to gambling where I would waste most of my money thinking that I am going to win big. I would never stop coming to church and

stop receiving the Lord's Supper for my forgiveness. I would never turn away from Jesus and put myself before him. Paul warns us, "So then if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall." (1 Corinthians 10:12)

But what happens when we do fall? What happened to Peter? The Good Shepherd sought him out. He confronted him and brought him to repentance. You see the change in Peter in his answer to Jesus' questions. He won't even use the same word that Jesus uses for love. He doesn't brag and say, "Of course, I love you." He appeals to Jesus perfect knowledge and understanding. And then says, Lord, you know all things, you know that I like you." (v. 17b)

What does Jesus do? He commissions Peter again to feed his lambs and sheep, to take care of the Lord's people. Jesus still had a job for Peter to do. It was to follow him and become a fisher of men. Just as Jesus had called Peter several years prior to leave his fishing business and follow him to catch people for the Lord, so he gives him the same assignment again. Does Jesus hold against Peter as he has done? NO! He forgives him and reassigns him.

Jesus does the same thing to you and me. When we stumble, when we wander and stray, the Lord seeks us out and he calls us back. He pardons our guilt and shame. He washes our sins away and covers them in his holy blood and then says, "Follow me". We don't have to carry with us the guilt and shame of our sins. We don't have to beat ourselves up over all the good we have failed to do. We are safe and secure. Our need for pardon and acceptance has been met. Jesus met it by his perfect sacrifice. Our Savior has made peace for each and everyone of us. Now we can joyfully and freely follow our Savior through life and carry out the assignments he has given to us to be his lights in the world, to confess his name before others, to live a life that strives to conform to our God's will.

OUR GOOD SHEPHERD KEEPS US FOCUSED

Even though Jesus has done all this for us, it is still easy to get sidetracked and begin looking at someone else and wondering about them rather than following Jesus and doing what the Lord has given us to do.

We see this happen to Peter. After forgiving Peter and restoring him to his assignment as an apostle, Jesus says to Peter, "I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted, but when you are old you will stretch out your hands and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." (v. 18) John then makes this comment on Jesus' words, "Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, 'Follow me!'" What kind of death was Peter going to experience? Tradition has it that Peter was crucified just like Jesus, but upside down because he did not wish to be crucified in the same manner as his Lord. Peter did suffer a martyr's death as did all the other apostles except John who evidently died a natural death.

When Peter heard Jesus' words he turned around and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved who had reclined next to Jesus on that Thursday evening when Jesus ate the last Passover Meal with his disciples. It was this disciple who had asked Jesus, "Lord, who is going to betray you?" (v. 20c) This disciple is the Apostle John, the writer of this Gospel. So when Peter saw John he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about him?" (v. 21)

Listen to Jesus' answer. Our Lord said to Peter, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? Follow me." (v. 22) Jesus says to Peter; don't concern yourself with what is going to happen to John that is not your business. You follow me and do what I have for you to do. John does comment that Jesus' words got distorted and misunderstood. There were some who assumed from what Jesus said that John was never going to die but remain alive until the final day when Jesus returned in glory to judge all people. John clarifies that when he writes, "Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?" (v. 23b)

Isn't it easy at times to look at someone else and focus more on what someone else is doing or not doing rather than concerning ourselves with the assignments that the Lord has given to us in life? We can become like Peter and wonder about someone else's life and work rather than staying focused on our life and work. Jesus would have us stay focused on our own lives and what God has given to us to do in this life rather than focusing on someone else. We have the command to follow Jesus. My walk is not the same as yours. Your assignments are not the same as mine and the gifts and abilities that God has given to each of us are different. We are not to be busybodies in other people's affairs.

We follow the path that Jesus has set before us and walk with confidence, forgiveness and assurance because we know that Jesus our Good Shepherd is taking care of us his sheep. And one day our Shepherd will welcome us into his heavenly pasture there to be with him in peace and to live in his house forever

Amen.