

Sunday, May 12, 2019

Acts 9:36-43

Psalm 23—747 VU

John 10:11-30

### Jesus Our Good Shepherd

Numbers are all around us and fill our world and our daily living. Quickly can you name 5 ways you are numbered—bank account, social insurance, telephone—land and cell, driver's license, credit card and wait even here your envelope number. But what is amazing is when we can share numbers and impress others... pi is often used to do this for it seems to be a random number generated to help mathematicians and physicists to be impressive. Sometimes I wonder "how I wish I could calculate pi" or at least the first 7 digits...3.141592 and remember them...Maybe there is a trick in this as well. "How I wish I could calculate pi" 3.141592 If you figure it out let me know after!

Numbers are everywhere and in many situations we are known only by number. But in the church family it is important that we know you by name for as a church family we want to connect with you and see you for who you are. Not a number but a name.

We know that the government uses our Social Insurance Number to identify us, and of course each year we file taxes- all numbers in forms attached to our number so that we can expect either to pay or receive a specified number of dollars. But numbers are so significant in our life that mathematics is being taught at higher levels in our elementary and secondary schools because after people leave the time of their formal education they need to know how to encounter and work with numbers under many circumstances. We live in a number based world. But what is significant is that even though there are 7 billion people alive in the world today, and billions of people have lived before us. Currently there are 131.4 million people are born each year around the world which on average tells us that there are 4 births per second. Taking into consideration that there are 55.3 million people dying each year that is 2 deaths per second.. numbers are very important to understand. Not only at statisticians and data management people important for economical and ecological reasons, the numbers tell us many stories.

Yet today's reading from John 10 is significant because what is amazing is that God knows us intimately and in fact far better than we know ourselves. This is important to

remember. In spite of the fact that the image of shepherd and sheep is not all that familiar to many, the words Jesus speaks are important. I know my sheep and my sheep know me.

The questions we must ask are simply- how well does Jesus know you? and how well do you know Jesus? What does this mean? Jesus is teaching and debating the Law with rabbis specifically about the healing of the man who was born blind. The Pharisees have questioned Jesus and when they spoke with the healed man, they confront him as to why he was trying to teach them about Jesus' healing him—after all he had been filled with sin as blind man. So they drove him out of the synagogue. Jesus learns of this and asks him, "Do you believe in the Son of Man? He answered, "Who is he- tell me so that I may believe in him." Jesus said "you have seen him, for I am speaking to you." The man responded, "I believe."

Some of the Pharisees near Jesus heard this conversation and questioned him again? It is then Jesus begins speaking of himself as the Good Shepherd- the one who blocks the gate of the sheepfold so that no one or animal can get in or out of the pen. And he speaks of himself as the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep. Jesus describes himself in this way as people at that time would know that the shepherd is the one who has deeply invested himself in the sheep—for he would have been present at their birth, at the time of shearing and as they would have been lead from the sheepfold to pasture and back. It is the shepherd who leads them, protects them with his crook, and embraces them when they wander off. It is the shepherd who lives his life caring for the sheep. A hired hand does not care for the animals like a shepherd and there is definitely a difference between them.

People who believe in God are in a very large field we call the world. Many voices are calling us to come and join them. The voice of materialism wants us to deny our faith in the supernatural and believe only in the physical world. The voice of consumerism calls us to fulfill our envy by overspending on vacations, cars, clothing and a home. The voice of entertainment wants to fill our lives with media driven flashes that grab our attention, isolate us from our family and friends and then leave us with nothing but an oversized bill. Yet if we truly knowing Jesus and following him—we know his voice and will get back on the path to where he will lead our lives. He doesn't need our numbers, or email addresses, or anything like this—He calls us by name. And if we have professed our faith in Jesus, we will hear this call. This call is a gift of God's grace that will continue to speak to us no matter what our daily life includes. No matter what we are thinking and feeling and searching for- no matter where we find ourselves. If we hear Jesus' voice—we will respond.

This is the relationship we should all be seeking with Christ- where we know him and he knows us and can call us to serve each other, to minister to others and to listen to him and be transformed, changed and renewed through his presence in our lives. This is God's grace offered through Jesus' as shepherd, and the One who died and rose again for our sakes. This is God's grace and this makes us Christ's followers by faith.

Many years ago there was a debate that took place in a comparative religions conference where the wise and the scholarly were in a spirited debate about what is unique about Christianity. Someone suggested what set Christianity apart from other religions was the concept of incarnation, the idea that God became incarnate in human form—Jesus coming to earth and living as human. But someone quickly said, "Well, actually, other faiths believe that God appears in human form." Another suggestion was offered: what about resurrection? The belief that death is not the final word. That the tomb was found empty. Someone slowly shook his head. Other religions have accounts of people returning from the dead.

Then, as the story is told, C.S. Lewis walked into the room, tweed jacket, pipe, an armful of papers, and a little early for his presentation. He sat down and took in the conversation, which had by now evolved into a fierce debate. Finally during a lull, he spoke saying, "what's all this rumpus about?" Everyone turned in his direction. Trying to explain themselves they said, "We're debating what's unique about Christianity." "Oh, that's easy," answered Lewis, "it is grace." The room fell silent.

This is the gift of God's love given to us through Jesus Christ the Son—God's grace and how we live and move amongst fellow believers, our church family here and around the world.

God's grace is what Jesus was trying to teach the disciples about. It is most clearly expressed in the promises of God embodied in Jesus Christ. It is the love of God shown to the unlovely; the peace of God given to the restless; the unmerited favor of God. Grace is getting what you don't deserve, and not getting what you do deserve. Christianity teaches that what we deserve is death with no hope of resurrection. But Jesus changed this- and if we follow him—in relationship like sheep and shepherd our lives are forever changed and we will experience life eternal in God's promised home.

Jesus is our good shepherd through him we shall not be in want. God's grace is given to us—let us rejoice for we are forgiven and continue to be the sheep of his pasture!. Thanks be to God!

## PRAYER

God of grace and love we praise you that Jesus is our Good Shepherd and that we are his sheep. Bless us O God and enable us to listen for Jesus to call us so that we might follow in his ways and teachings all of our lives. We ask in faith and with hope. Amen.