

SUNDAY May 11, 2025      “Am I a Sheep?”

Psalms 23   Acts 9: 36-43   Revelation 7:9-17   John 10: 22-30

Where do you stand with Jesus? This might seem like an easy question to answer if one believes in him as the Risen Christ. How we answer this question is by what we know of and about Jesus: He is the teacher, healer, rabbi, and friend. He is the one who heard hosannas and crucifixion being shouted at him and he is the one whom people have called Shepherd but also the Lamb.

And some of you might even say, it depends upon the context of who we are or whether we believe in him as God's Son, and whether we have faith and know him as saviour. So to answer this question: where do you stand with Jesus? We need to have a bit of context!

Today is Good Shepherd Sunday when we focus on both the Shepherd and the Lamb and how these interrelate and how they affect us and who we are. Psalm 23 is one of the most beloved scripture passages in the Bible. IT is a song written by David who was a young shepherd in charge of his father's many sheep. While looking after them, there are few distractions. So David reflected on the incessant care that sheep require- their helplessness and defenselessness. His words reflect how they stray away from a clear path to a water stream, over paths of rocks and their constant need for a guide. IT is from the time when lambs are born and many months of caring for each sheep, that David thought about the need for the sheep to trust him before they would follow. David reflected and wrote about those times when in dangerous times they surrounded him until they were safe again. As a shepherd he would have known how to care for each sheep if it was hurt, scratched or bruised. He also rescued them from harm with the tools of his work- a crook, a rod and maybe a sling and a rock. But the sheep would not know how much they were cared for. David was also gifted with writing many songs about his faith in God in what we call the book of Psalms. And it is David's reflection on the knowledge he had of sheep and how God was very much like a good shepherd.

Shepherds were valuable employees to many farmers or landowners. They worked diligently with sheep and they knew the sheep- they knew their peculiarities, characteristic marks, tendencies, idiosyncrasies and the sheep knew them. Shepherds would call the lambs to them and they would follow to where they would eat and drink quietly. Shepherds would use the crook to rescue the sheep from places they had run to or to restrain them if they wandered away. We read in I Samuel 17 that David would go after a sheep if it was carried off by a predator and he would strike the animal and rescue the sheep. If the lambs wandered away the shepherd had to go and find it; carry it around his neck if needed and then return home. At the end of the day the shepherd would lead his flock to the safety of

the fold. He would often sleep across the gate just to protect them. A good shepherd never left his sheep alone. The shepherd was their lifeline.

Hundreds of years later Jesus states, "I am the good shepherd..." But we remember that as a boy and youth Jesus did not care for sheep nor did he spend his days and nights out in pastureland looking after sheep. Joseph taught him the trade of carpentry and so he would have been in the carpentry shop working with his earthly father while others in the community tended the flocks. Yet when Jesus states, "I am the good shepherd," he describes himself as the one who cares like a shepherd to those who would follow him. His experience of the sheep / shepherd relationship was because of his knowing people who did this work and sharing it with him. NO doubt that his mother Mary had told him of the story of his birth where shepherds came to see him- people who were not wealthy but loved the animals and the land.

Jesus describes the relationship between a good shepherd and sheep. The shepherd risks his life for the sheep even when danger comes. The hired hand runs away. But a good shepherd cares for the sheep and they know him. Jesus then states, "just as the father knows me and I know the father- I lay down my life for the sheep."

The question asked is where do you stand with Jesus, the good shepherd? In his teachings, Jesus told stories and parables about sheep and shepherds. Like the shepherd who leaves 99 sheep alone to go after and rescue the one lost sheep. (Matthew 18:12-14) and how Jesus came to seek and save what was lost- sheep, people!

Jesus is the good shepherd because he loves people because he has a shepherd's heart that beats with pure and generous love. Jesus sees and takes in the whole flock not missing any sheep which wander away. AS a shepherd to all who follow him, Jesus is faithful and leave us alone. Through his strength we are healed and through his tenderness we are cared for and loved. This is Jesus as shepherd.

So where do you stand with the shepherd? Through faith it is up to us to follow and go where he leads. But why do we do this? Because what is ironic is that Jesus is also known as the Lamb of God! This title for Jesus appears in John 1:29, where John the Baptist sees Jesus and exclaims, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." John the Baptist states this again in John 1:36 because John saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove and it remained on him.

John calls Jesus Lamb of God out of honour and respect to the words of the prophet Isaiah for Jesus would be 'pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities, the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.' Is 53: 5-6 And what is also amazing is that Isaiah also uses this image of our being like sheep who have turned away from God and yet the saving shepherd is the one who will redeem us. The shepherd becomes the Lamb, the Lamb of God is the shepherd.

There is a story about sheep not being very bright. This is a claim made by many cattle ranchers simply because sheep do not behave like cows. Cattle are herded from the rear by hooting cowboys with cracking whips, but that will not work with sheep at all. IF one were to stand behind them and make loud noises, all sheep would do is run around behind you, because they prefer to be led. You push cows, but you lead sheep, and they will not go anywhere that someone else does not go first. They need a shepherd to lead them to show them that everything is all right as they walk forward. Sheep know their shepherd and their shepherd knows them.

So where do you stand with Jesus? Are you his sheep? Are you walking in front and leading your life your way? Or are you following the Good Shepherd enabling Jesus to lead your life as the good shepherd. Are you following the shepherd? Are you his Sheep?

Let us pray

God of grace and hope we praise you that Jesus is the Good Shepherd and died for us. We are in awe of his resurrection knowing through faith that he did this so that we are forgiven and that he will lead our lives. Remind us that we are sheep and he is the shepherd who will lead and guide our lives always.

Hear us o God we pray> Amen

"His Sheep am I" 24 Folk Celebration

