

**+ John 10:22-30 + The Resurrection Life: Following—Not Forsaking +  
+ 4th Sunday of Easter + 26 April 2015 +**

**Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

At the end of our service, we're going to sing a simple children's hymn that starts out, ***"I am Jesus' little lamb..."*** (*Christian Worship* 432:1), but it won't just be the kids singing. No, young and old will sing that simple hymn together, even all of you teens and adults. Now at first glance, it might seem a little odd for grown adults to call themselves "Jesus' little lambs," but isn't that what we are?

In fact, you could argue that Jesus the Good Shepherd cradling a lamb in his arms is one of the most comforting Christian images of all. For centuries in paintings and stained glass windows, sculptures and drawings inside of Roman catacombs, that picture of the Good Shepherd holding a lamb in his arms or on his shoulders has brought comfort and reassurance to frightened, hurting, and dying souls. It shouldn't be any surprise, then, that that picture of Jesus is often one of the first that comes to mind.

Now this morning we don't have an artist's depiction before us, but we do have the words of the Good Shepherd himself. We have a Shepherd who lovingly calls us to follow and not forsake his gentle voice. He is no ordinary shepherd, because in his loving, nail-pierced hands we find rest and safety and more than we can imagine as part of this resurrection life.

To follow the Good Shepherd, you need to listen to his voice. One winter day months before Jesus' death, he was walking through the temple courts in Jerusalem when suddenly a large crowd confronted him. In the weeks before this, Jesus had been facing increased opposition. Some thought he was demon-possessed. Others thought he was just raving mad. Still others wondered if he was the Messiah. Many dismissed him—***"Why listen to him?"*** Hostility was growing against Jesus, so this crowd was no surprise.

***"How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly."*** These people weren't looking for a Shepherd. No, they wanted to trap Jesus into claiming to be God so they could have him put to death for blasphemy. Of course, Jesus, the all-knowing God, saw through their trap. He answered, ***"I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me."*** The Shepherd was calling, but no one was listening.

The people in the crowds didn't want to follow a "shepherd" who had come to suffer and die. No, they wanted to follow a "shepherd" who would bring them glory right now. They wanted a "shepherd" who would give them what they wanted, who would tell them what they wanted to hear, who would help them topple the Roman government and establish an even greater empire. They heard none of that as Jesus called them to listen to him and follow.

They had no good reason to forsake Jesus. In the three years prior, he had spoken the Word as God himself. Jesus had backed his claims of being the Messiah with action. In the previous chapter, Jesus healed a man born blind. In the chapter after our text, Jesus proves his almighty power again by raising Lazarus from the dead. He performed countless miracles and proved himself to be their Good Shepherd, but they refused to listen to his voice. They would rather forsake him than follow his voice, so the Shepherd sadly had to condemn them. ***"You are not my sheep."***

You and I eagerly sing ***"I am Jesus' little lamb..."***, but do we always mean it? Are you always happy following the Good Shepherd or do you look for something more? Are there times when you wish the Shepherd would tell you what you want to hear and give you what you want when you want it? Are there times when you would rather be "free" to do what you want than to obey his voice, especially when you don't like what he tells you?

So easily we ignore the Shepherd's voice. When you do that you're like a lamb so focused on the next juicy tuft of grass that it completely blocks out the shepherd's voice. The lamb strays far from the flock following the good grass until it finds itself lost in unfamiliar territory with no way of knowing how to get back. When you fail to listen to the Shepherd's voice, the same thing happens to you. Ignoring the Shepherd's voice, you become lost in the dangerous wilderness of this life and can't find your way back. You lose the assurance of his promises. The world with all its dangers and worries and fear becomes much more terrifying. Uncertainty fills your life.

Yet the Good Shepherd tells us, ***“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.”*** Sheep will only follow a shepherd they can trust. By his actions and the familiarity of his voice, a shepherd gains the trust of his flock so they will follow him wherever he leads them, even when in danger. Jesus has done exactly that as our Good Shepherd. He willingly gave up the glory of heaven to take on your human flesh, to subject himself to poverty and difficulty and life in a corrupt, sinful world in your place.

In fact, he even laid down his life for the sheep—for you and me. An ordinary shepherd won’t normally do that, but Jesus is no ordinary shepherd. Months after our lesson, Jesus allowed himself to suffer at the hands of those enemies who wanted his blood. He allowed them to crucify him and take his life, but the Good Shepherd took his life back up again after three days in the tomb. With a Shepherd like that, you can surely listen to his voice when he calls you through the Gospel to follow him.

As you follow him through the Gospel, you quickly realize that the Good Shepherd knows you. He knows your faults and your gifts. He knows your joys and your sorrows. He knows what troubles you in the middle of the night, what weighs on your heart, and what you need most. He knows what it took to make you his own and what it takes to keep you in his flock.

***“I am Jesus’ little lamb; ever glad at heart I am, for my shepherd gently guides me, knows my needs and well provides me, loves me ev’ry day the same, even calls me by my name.”*** The Shepherd knows you and takes care of you, but what brings even more comfort and assurance to your heart is knowing you are safely in his loving hands. ***“I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.”***

***“No one can snatch them out of my hand.”*** No one can snatch you out of the loving hands of your living Savior! Isaiah described this when he wrote, ***“He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.”*** (Isaiah 40:11) Did you know that Jesus is holding you close to his heart, even during those times when he seems far away? That gives you certainty when you struggle with job insecurity or the fear of the unknown. That gives you comfort when you deal with the loss of a loved one or struggle with a nagging health problem. That gives you confidence when you struggle with living out your faith in an anti-Christian environment or when you deal with peer pressure or when you strive to uphold the truth in the workplace.

The Good Shepherd can make those promises because he is ***“one with the Father”*** and has backed his promises with action. When Jesus conquered death on Easter morning, he proved every promise true. He validated every action with the approval of the holy God. Now you can rest securely in the Savior’s nail-pierced hands. ***“No one can snatch them out of my hand!”***

The Apostle Paul took this promise to heart and rejoiced in the confidence of a lamb resting in the Shepherd’s arms. ***“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”*** (Romans 8:35) Shall persecution for being followers of Christ? Shall famine or any other force of nature? Shall nakedness or any other want or need? Shall danger or disease or sword? ***“No one can snatch them out of my hand,”*** the Lord promises. Absolutely no human being, no warring nation, no force of nature, no illness, no death, no spiritual force or enemy of God will ever be able to tear you away from your Shepherd’s loving, pierced hands.

That means you can follow your Savior’s voice, boldly trusting that he guides every step and provides for every need. That means you need not fear any evil as you walk the path of this life. That means you can daily cling to your loving Shepherd, because he won’t let go of you. That means you can speak up for the truth and speak the truth in love. That means that no matter what the world might throw at you, you rest safely in the Savior’s hands. All of that is true because the Good Shepherd lives for you and gives you life!

The resurrection life in the Good Shepherd ultimately means life eternal. Jesus promises that you won’t die. ***“I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish,”*** literally, “They will never die for eternity.” Yes, you’ll probably pass through the doorway of physical death, but that’s all it is—a doorway. On the other side, you have life without sorrow or worry or tears as we heard in Revelation 7. You can be certain of that, because your Shepherd took his life back up again. When you pass through that doorway of death, your Shepherd will give you a life with him that lasts forever.

***“I am Jesus’ little lamb...”*** How comforting to know that that’s what you really are! Listen to your Shepherd’s voice and follow him. He knows what’s best for you and will provide more than you need. He will guide you safely through this life to a glorious eternity in heaven, resting securely in his loving, nail-pierced hands. ***“Who***

***so happy as I am, even now the shepherd's lamb? And when my short life is ended, by his angel hosts attended, he shall fold me to his breast, there within his arms to rest.***" (CW 432:3) **Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.**