

May 3, 2020
4th Sunday after Easter

The Great Paradox

Psalm 23

1 Peter 2:19-25

John 10:1-11

It's Easter season and as I've mentioned before in our previous Easter sermons, Easter is known as a week of weeks. That is, it is 7 weeks long. Each week having seven days, each week having Seven days in it, therefore it's 49 days. The 50th day is Pentecost. Our theme this year in Easter has been hope. A week of weeks of hope. In our first sermon, we heard how we have a living hope. A living hope because our hope is in Christ and Christ through the resurrection is alive. But we also saw that that living hope comes with a life that Jesus Himself gave us. A life where he gives us peace; peace that passes all human understanding. A life where he gives us purpose, because he gave us the commission to go and make disciples of all nations. And yet if that was our own doing, we'd be in trouble. He also promised to give us the Holy Spirit to empower us, to give us the words to speak. So, we have a living hope, and a life with purpose.

The next week we saw that Peter told us to prepare our minds for action and to prepare our minds for the action of being the living hope in this world. So that others who see us, may see the hope that comes through Christ that they may literally, since we are ambassadors for Christ, see Christ in us.

Last week we focused on that hope being real. In the Greek language the word hope means an assured expectation or a promise with a guarantee. We talked about that a lot in our country lately, with stimulus checks and everything that it comes with the full faith and confidence and backing of the United States government. And yet compared to the full faith and backing of God, the Creator of heaven and earth; the promises that come from our government just don't seem so sure anymore.

Today I'm going to look at another area of hope; a hope filled path shall we say. I'd like to start with something that I think probably everyone who's listening to this sermon or watching this video has heard before. It's the 23rd psalm, a great psalm of King David. If you've watched any moviewhere someone has died, and they show the funeral; you almost always see some actor up there acting as the pastor and they read the 23rd psalm. You probably could say it with me. The Lord is my Shepherd I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. The message of the 23rd Psalm is very simple. We are

sheep and God is the Shepherd. He is the Shepherd of us. Now when you think about it, I can honestly say, 'wow, that sounds good!' The Lord is my Shepherd and I'm not going to want. He is going to make me lie down in green pastures. And I don't know if you've ever laid down in a mountain meadow, but it is quite relaxing. He will lead me beside still waters, not raging waters but waters peacefully flowing through that valley. He restores my soul, he refreshes me, he reenergizes me. You know when you think about it, you kind of get a warm fuzzy.

Yet, when we turn to our gospel this morning, you see it comes with warnings. Jesus told us, "he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber." Suddenly the biblical picture changes from this beautiful meadow with a meandering stream and Jesus standing there with a lamb on his shoulder, staff in his hand, beautiful white puffy clouds in the sky; suddenly it changes to some guys climbing over the fence into the sheepfold where they would come at night and this man's a thief. He's a robber. This is not good. These are those who want to take the sheep away from the Shepherd. In fact, Jesus continues, and he says, "the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy." Now if you are a lamb, that does not sound good. But when you think about it, think about what that says about the thief. The thief has no concern for the life of the sheep. He is just wants to kill them. When Jesus spoke of this, He was speaking of those who had come before Him and said, 'I'm the Messiah, I'm the answer.' And they had led people in the conflicts, in wars and battles and they lost their lives because they listened to the thief to the robbers.

Let's think about that robber concept. Robbers take from you. When you look at the history of Israel, they had kings, they had religious leaders, who robbed the people of their money with unfair taxes and unjust taxes. So while you get this image of this sheep pen, and it's the Lord sheep in it, and the Lord who oversees it, there are those who creep in and they take out, and they destroy, and they inflict harm on; it takes us back to what Peter had said and we have looked at the last two weeks; 'prepare your minds for action.' Another way of putting that is 'don't be stupid sheep.' Instead, as Peter said in 1st Peter 1:23, we are to be born again; not of perishable seed he says, this would have been with the words of the thieves and the robbers who say the things to get the sheep to follow them. But it's not true. We are to be born again not of perishable seed, but imperishable, through the living and abiding Word of God.

Now what does that prepare us for? When we are born again, of the living and abiding Word of God, it leads us to the three statements that come from John chapter 10. Where Jesus says His first; "I Am the door," yes this is one of those places in the book of John where Jesus says "I Am." He's using the Greek words from the

Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, for God's name. It's the "I Am" of the burning bush. So, when he says, "I Am the door" the first thing He is saying is "I Am God." And as a result, "I Am the door." Now what does this tell us about Jesus? Well, first of all since He's the door, He is the one who allows people to come through it. Only those who He allows to come through the door, will come through that door. Second, for someone to come through that door, He must accept them. Therefore, they must line up with His Word, with His action, and with His love for the sheep. Third, the sheep can only enter the sheep pen or the sheepfold through Him. And I know this isn't politically correct, but it is the truth of God's Word. There is only one way for salvation and that is through Jesus Christ. He is the door. While the sheep can only get into the sheepfold through Him, they only leave that sheepfold or that sheep pen through Him. As the Shepherd, He leads them out.

Which leads us to the second saying, "I Am the Good Shepherd." Again, He invokes the name of God, "I Am." I Am God's and as a result "I Am the Good Shepherd." So, what makes Him a Good Shepherd? The thieves, the robbers who want to climb the wall and get in, they're going to say they are shepherds, what makes Him the better? Jesus defines it for us. "I lay down my life for the sheep." Hired hands don't. There's a warning there. There are those who look like they work for Jesus, but they don't. They are not willing to sacrifice for the sheep. They are nothing more than thieves and robbers who have snuck in. This is anyone who pedals a religion using the name of Jesus, claiming to be followers of Him, yet they stray from His Word.

The third great statement, is the exact same as the second, but Jesus repeats it, "I Am the Good Shepherd." We know He's the Good Shepherd because He lays down His life for the sheep; but why else is He the Good Shepherd? He continues and He says, "I know my own and my own know me." The sheep follow Him for they know His voice. That takes us back again to 1st Peter where we have to prepare our minds for action. What action? To be born again not of perishable seed but of the imperishable seed, but an imperishable seed through the living in a fighting word of God. So that we know His voice and so that we know Him the Good Shepherd and the door.

Now, as we look at this concept of God, or Jesus as the Good Shepherd where the sheep know Him and know His voice. Let's go back to that 23rd Psalm which is so beautiful. The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside the still waters, he restores my soul. He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His own name's sake. Now listen, "even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death." Suddenly, we have this great

paradox, everything is sounding good and then we hit this, 'walking through the valley of the shadow of death.' That just does not sound good. And the reality of what King David is writing about in the 23rd Psalm is revealed in 1st Peter 2:19 to 25 our epistle this morning. Listen again to what Peter said and ask yourself does this sound good? "Servants be subject to your masters with all respect; not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust." This is a gracious thing. If it's a gracious thing, it means it's undeserved. So, we're going to respect them and do good on their behalf even though they don't deserve it. This is a gracious thing when mindful of God. See when we realize that we are a slave, a servant; we are under the power of someone else; we need to realize and be mindful that is our real Master. Whoever is putting these pressures on us or controlling us doing that which might be downright unjust, they are not our master, but we are to be subject to them with all respect whether there good and gentle or unjust. It's a gracious thing when we are mindful of God when, (and I quote) "when one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly." In other words, Saint Peter says you know it's not a big deal if you sin and suffer. That's called justice. What's the big deal is if you are righteous, you're doing what is right and then you suffer because of doing right. This is what he says is a gracious thing in the sight of God. Why is it a gracious thing in the sight of God? Because Christ also suffered for you, is what Peter says. And why did Christ suffer for you? Listen to what Peter says, 'so that you might follow in His steps.'

Let's go back to that sheep pen. Jesus is the door and the only way out is through the door. It is through Him and who is He once we're out? He's the Shepherd that leads us and where does He lead us? He leads us through the valley of the shadow of death. Peter continues; "For to this you have been called." We've been called to follow Him through this valley of the shadow of death. Think of what that is saying. A valley has mountains on one side, mountains on the other side. You're traveling through the middle of it. There are enemies on this side, on this side and above you ready to shoot down on you. You were in the worst possible position from a war strategy model. This is not good. But to this you have been called, to follow in His steps. Jesus walked through that valley of that shadow of death. It took Him right to Calvary and it took Him to the cross. And yet, as Peter writes, He committed no sin. He didn't hit anybody, He didn't curse anybody, He didn't call lightning from heaven. No deceit was found in His mouth. He didn't call them names. It says He prayed for them. When reviled, He didn't revile in return. Just think of that when Jesus was up on the cross and the religious leaders said 'if you are the Christ, take yourself down.' He could have looked at them and said, 'OK and now I'm going to put you up there.' I think He could have just done it by His word. He did not revile in return. When He suffered, He did not threaten, He bore our sins in His own body. And he continued, Peter writes; "he continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly.

Now you know what Jesus was doing when He said “Father into your hands do, I commit my spirit.” He was walking through this valley of the shadow of death. He was getting hammered from all sides and yet he stayed on that road and entrusted Himself into God’s hand. And so, the question is, do you hear his voice? Do you hear the voice of Jesus saying, walk with me into the valley of the shadow of death? Walk with me on the path that I follow. It's a hope filled path because I've been there, and I know the way to life, eternal life. Therefore, fear no evil, for I am with you, I will comfort you, because I know exactly what you're feeling. And in the end, you will come out of that valley of the shadow of death. Notice it is not the valley of death, it's the valley of the shadow of death. It looks like it, but you're going to step out of the valley of the shadow of death, and like King David you are going to say, ‘I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.’ This is where Jesus says I will lead you to.

Do you hear His voice? Are you ready to walk with Him through the Valley of the shadow of death; to the joy and the riches of I will make you lie down in green pastures, leading me beside the still waters, restores my soul? You see when King David wrote the 23rd psalm, he started it out with what was going to happen. And in the middle, he told them this is where I'm at right now. I'm in the valley of the shadow of death. But God will deliver me. I will dwell in the House of the Lord forever. David heard the Shepherd’s voice and he knew the valley and he was ready to walk down. He walked down it because he knew the hope that was at the end of that valley. There's a hope there.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, that is the path that Christ calls us to walk. It's a path with many challenges. It's a path where we may be treated unjustly. But it's a path where Christ calls us to be like Him. To follow Him and commit no sins, to have no deceit in our mouths, we don't revile when we are reviled, we don't threaten when we suffer just bear it. It's just gracious thing in the sight of God. We look forward to being with our Master, with the Good Shepherd who was willing to lay down His life for us, and to dwell in Him forever. That is the great parable, the path that is both the valley of the shadow of death, and yet it is the most hope filled path in the world. It is the path with the hope, the promise, the guaranteed by God; life with Him in heaven.

In our Savior’s name. Amen