

Christ is **Good Shepherd Sunday** Risen on the 15th Risen. Indeed
Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...

Today as you may know churches around the world celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday... a reference to our Gospel reading this morning in John 10:14 where Jesus says, "*I am the Good Shepherd, I know my own - and my own know me*"...

In fact, one of the earliest depictions of our Lord – that was found in the Roman Catacombs – has that familiar image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd (that some of us remember seeing on the walls of Sunday school classrooms) of Jesus carrying a lamb on his shoulders (the one that got lost) – which was meant to remind us that we are not only loved by our Lord (but it's that love that carries us throughout our lives)...

Perhaps this is also why we love to recite the 23rd Psalm that reminds us, "*The Lord is my Shepherd*"... and when in times of trouble we further remind ourselves, "*Yea, though I walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death – I will fear no evil*"... why?... because God's Word reminds us that we are not alone – but it also reminds us (as John's Gospel reminds us this morning) that we are known, by the Good Shepherd...

As some of you know, I was introduced to yoga a few years ago (by a very talented woman in our congregation)... and what's interesting about learning yoga is that you not only learn postures, and poses, and breathing techniques – but you're also introduced to what I like to call, 'Yoga lingo'... words like 'chaturanga' and 'chakra' – 'prana' and 'sav asana' - become almost like a second language to those who find themselves practicing the art...

But there's another word that I have really grown to appreciate... and that is, 'Namaste'... now I will admit that when I first heard that word I thought it was a simple greeting or a salutation (like 'peace be with you' or 'God bless you')... a simple way of sharing kindness... and I suppose in some ways it is...

But in doing a simple Google search on the word 'Namaste' I have come to realize that it has a much deeper connotation... in fact, Namaste can be understood to mean, "I see the divine spark in you"... or "in this moment I see YOU"... or it can mean, "In this moment I am taking the time to KNOW YOU"... to know the real you... your true self...

I love that word (and I love its meaning) especially when it's said in a culture where so often we can feel like *nothing more than a number* (or perhaps we are only known for what we have *or don't have*) rather than for who we really are...

And, of course, that isn't only *done to us* (but because of the busyness of our lives) we are equally guilty in not taking the time to know the people *we meet along the way*: a waitress, a clerk, a member of the church, a neighbor, and perhaps even some of our own friends and family... so often we are too busy *to really get to know* the people around us... and to pay attention to who they really are...

But that's why I love Good Shepherd Sunday... because it's on this day that we're not only reminded that Jesus loves us as a Shepherd loves his flock (but that he also knows us)... knows us deeply – all of our strengths and gifts (but also all of our flaws and shortcomings – our weaknesses and our failings)... and yet, still we are loved and we are forgiven... it's one of the things we mean when we say, "This is the Good News"... that our Shepherd loves us (but also knows us better than we know ourselves)... and what a gift it is to be known...

But notice that our reading from John's Gospel also says, "*And my own know me*"...

Notice that it doesn't say that his own *know about him* – but that they "know him"... in other words, there's a relationship – an intimacy – a coming together – a desire to learn more... or, as a friend once said, "It's paying attention to Jesus"... and trying to understand who he is and what he teaches...

And so, let me ask you – how well do you know Jesus?... how well do you know Jesus as the Good Shepherd of your life?...

That was a question that a woman at Reformation Lutheran Church on the southside of Chicago asked me when I was a field student (at that church in my first year of seminary)... I had been teaching Bible study that afternoon and really wanted to impress them with everything I had learned at (LSTC) the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago... and so I threw at them dates, and theological words... I had bible verses and cross references... the names of scholars and biblical theories... and I even brought a few maps with me for good measure... I was there to show them what's up... I was a first-year seminarian...

But this woman – who was not only the matriarch of the church – (but had lost a son to gun violence, was raising three of her grandchildren, had struggled to pay bills all of her life, and had experienced domestic violence by more than one man)

was not impressed... and I'll always remember what she said to me... she said, *"Honey, they can teach you ABOUT Jesus in that school you go to – but if you really want to know Jesus you need to get on your knees - and listen... that's where we really get to know him"...*

And by the time I left that church I saw what she meant (by the way she lived her own life)... in fact, practicing her faith wasn't just something she did on Sunday... but her faith in Jesus was the main thing in her life... it was the most important thing... because she approached it as a relationship...and yes, she knew a few things *about Jesus* and she certainly knew God's Word (but there was no mistaken that what she really knew – was Jesus in her heart) as friend, as companion, as Savior, and as a Shepherd... a Good Shepherd that never let her down... and never led her astray... as a beloved member of the flock...

You know, from what I've read there is a difference in how some herd cattle, for instance (and how sheep are herd)... in fact, it said that cattle are pushed from behind (but it said that) the shepherd always leads the way for the sheep... and it's the voice of the shepherd that leads the way... that leads them to green pastures... to the still waters... to safety...

And friends, Jesus describes himself as the Good Shepherd... and in the midst of the chaos that tries to settle into our lives, of the chatter that so often tries to fill us with fear and with worry, and with so many voices that try to sell us something, or convince us of something, or even take away our hope – Jesus speaks the Word of God leads the way and wants to be heard (so that we, too, might dwell in the house of the Lord forever)...

This is why it tells us in Isaiah 30:21, *"And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying 'this is the way, walk in it'"*... Jeremiah 33:3 tells us, *"Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known"*... and in John 16:13 we read, *"When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth... and he will declare to you the things that are to come"...*

But in order to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd (God's Word tells us that we must follow)... follow Jesus (and God's voice will be heard)...

And so, I want to share with you something I read this week (while learning about sheep and shepherds) about a true story of a sheep from New Zealand (who's name was Shrek) who stopped listening to his shepherd... and as sheep are prone to do

(he wandered off and got lost)... according to one account he spent his time in hiding in the caves of New Zealand (and somehow survived for 6 years on his own)...

But what made this particular sheep story so interesting to people around the world was that while he was away from his shepherd his fleece continued to grow – so much so that it weighed more than 60 lbs, prevented Shrek from being able to see, made walking extremely difficult, and it would have killed him had he fallen onto his back (as he would have been unable to get back on his feet)...

And yet, as soon as he was found (and once again in the safe care of his shepherd) he was sheared in less than 15 minutes (and able to once again enjoy the life that only sheep can fully appreciate)...

But what I love about that story – is that it's a great reminder for us (that when we stop listening to the voice of the Good Shepherd – and we run off and allow ourselves to get lost in this world) – you can hide for a little while – but it will eventually cause each one of us to carry unnecessary burdens – will make life unmanageable – and will keep us away from the one who not only cares for us (but knows what we need – even better than we know ourselves)...

And so, if you've strayed or even if you just need a reminder - listen to the words of the Good Shepherd... Jesus says, *"Come to me, all of you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest... take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls... for my yoke is easy and my burden is light" ...*

Friends, the Good Shepherd loves you (he knows you) and he calls out your name... wanting you to follow him back home...

May the peace of our Lord fill your heart with his love, may your burdens be removed and your blessings be shared, and may the voice of the Good Shepherd lead you to still waters...

In Jesus' name we pray...

Amen!