

Sermon: 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

Text: John 10:11-18 (v.11)

Theme: The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep

Goal: To highlight the enormous love and sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: The image of Jesus as our Good Shepherd is well known. We love to see Him among the sheep with a little one in His lap. That image is so important that the ancient church dedicated one specific Sunday for it: The Sunday of the Good Shepherd, as we remember it today.

But what happens when the flock is attacked? When the wolf and other enemies come and try to destroy and to disperse the sheep? What does the Good Shepherd do? - Then we see the Good Shepherd hanging on the cross, because “the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep”.

## I – The Good Shepherd and the Hired Hand

In the first moment, it seems that the flock is dispersed and that the Shepherd is dead. The disciples were scattered and only few women were planning to pay a last visit to Jesus' dead body lying in the tomb. But with the same breath that Jesus had proclaimed that “The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep”, He also said: “No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father”. In willing obedience to His Father, Jesus fought for His sheep against all enemies: the people who didn't accept Him, the devil and even death! He fought like *a brave Shepherd to the point of death (Series B 134)* to defend His sheep and to let them live.

When He was arrested in the Gethsemane, He said to the soldiers: “If you are looking for me, then let these men go” (John 18:8). This shows His love for His sheep. Their lives were more important than His own life. He did whatever He could do to preserve the lives of His disciples.

A hired hand wouldn't do this. He works for money. The sheep don't belong to him. Jesus contrasts His care for the sheep with the lack of care of a hired hand. A hired hand abandons the sheep when dangers come.

Shall we follow the Good Shepherd, or shall we follow the hired hand and churches that want only profits from the sheep and exploit the sheep? If our eyes are fixed on Jesus and our ears are listening to Him only, we will follow Him even through death to eternal life. We are secure. “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not be in want.”

## II – The Good Shepherd and the other sheep

Jesus expresses a concern in this text about “other sheep”: “I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring the also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.”

This is Jesus' missionary concern. He doesn't look only to the sheep who are already in the sheep pen, but He looks for those who are outside, far, lost. The Parable of the Good Shepherd tells us how the Shepherd left the 99 sheep into the pen and went out to look for the one who was lost. And when He found it, He was glad and called all neighbors to rejoice with him, because He found the lost sheep!

During the three years of Jesus' ministry on earth, He paid special attention to His original flock, the people of Israel. But He foretold that other sheep would be brought to His sheep pen, from all around the world. And He sent His disciples to make new disciples from all

nations. So, we were also called since our baptism to be part of His sheep, under His care and protection. But His sheep pen is not full yet. He has many other sheep that he wants to call, through us. The missionary task of the Christian Church is to share the benefits we have by our Good Shepherd, and to share that He loves and wants all with Him. By our testimony, others will be called to enter the sheep pen of the Good Shepherd. Remember our Watchword again: “Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how He has had mercy on you.” If we don't invite them, maybe they will be invited by others who are hired hand or enemies of the Good Shepherd. Let us not miss the opportunity we have to bring our beloved ones to the arms of our Good Shepherd, beginning with our children and grandchildren.

### III – The Good Shepherd, we and the others.

The First Letter of John (3:16-18) repeats Jesus' statement in John 10 and adds something very important about us: “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.” And what does the apostle mean when he says this? He follows: “If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love in words or tongue, but with actions and truth.”

A flock is not just one sheep. “Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them” (Matt 18:20), said Jesus. We have to look outside our pen and see how we can help others. Maybe through our help they can see Jesus and hear His voice, coming to His sheep pen as well.

To lay down our life to the others is to give ourselves, our love, to the others. We don't need to lay down our life to death, as Jesus did it, once for all. But as we show concern to others and help them with sacrifice (not just with leftovers), this means to “lay down our life to

others”.

Next Sunday is the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of the month, when we collect food, clothes and other good for needy people. We will direct it to the Congolese community again. Don't forget your special donation.

Conclusion: I have a Jewish friend in my home city. He was born in Holland during the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War and his father was killed by the Nazis when he was around 7 years old. He has a big trauma from those days. He survived in a miraculous way and found refuge in Brazil. - He sent me a very nice version of Psalm 23 with pictures in a PPP some weeks ago. When I answered him, I said that Psalm 23 was accomplished in John chapter 10, when Jesus identified Himself with the Good Shepherd, who laid down His life for the sheep. He never questioned me about Jesus and the New Testament when I write him about; but he never confessed his faith in Jesus either. My hope and my prayer is that the Holy Spirit would be working in him; because he always contacts me for some counseling,... and this has been going on for years!

Jesus has His ways to call “the other sheep” to His sheep pen. He is patient and waits. He does not want to loose any of them, because He loves each of His sheep, - even the lost ones! - and He laid down His life for all. But at the same time He doesn't send angels anymore to share the Good News, but He gave us the task to go and tell about His love to others. He is the Good Shepherd and we are His sheep. In Him we trust and confess with David in the Psalm 23: “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not be in want... Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle  
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