

Good Shepherd Sunday - 2013

Your Shepherd Knows You

The text for our Good Shepherd Sunday sermon is the Gospel Lesson. From John 10 we hear again verse 27:

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Of all the people in the world, who knows you the best? If you are married, perhaps the person who knows you best would be your spouse. Or maybe for you, your mother or father is the one person in the world who knows you better than anyone else. Maybe it's a brother or a sister, or a best friend. Who is it, that often times knows what you're thinking, even before you say it? Who is it, that can usually predict the things you're going to do? Who can finish your sentences for you? Who knows you, better than anyone else? Whoever that person is, he or she must have a very close relationship with you.

Ultimately though, no one knows you better than you know yourself. Even the people that are the closest to you, really don't know you the way you know yourself. There are certain things you keep to yourself. There are certain thoughts you just don't want to share. There are certain things that bother you or scare you or interest you, and no one knows about those things except you. Of all the people in the world, the one person who knows you the best is you. So it is truly amazing to realize that there is someone who knows you BETTER, (much better, in fact) than you know yourself. And that someone is Jesus, your Good Shepherd.

"I know my sheep," Jesus says in John chapter 10. It is there that he tells us he is the Good Shepherd, and that he knows his sheep. Today we're going to see what that means, to be known by Christ, the Good Shepherd. How well does Jesus really know you? Today we'll reflect on that question, as we contemplate the truths about Christ, the Good Shepherd, who knows us, his sheep.

In the real world of sheep raising, even in this day and age, it's interesting to me how a shepherd can actually perceive differences in his or her sheep. From our casual point of view, all sheep look the same. Different shapes and sizes, but for the most part, slight variations on the same theme. A sheep is a sheep. If you've seen one sheep, you've seen them all. Right? Not true. You see, a shepherd spends a lot of time with the sheep, and as he does, he gets to know the different personalities and quirks of each one of his sheep. That one over there, he might say, likes to stray away from the flock. This one over here, he gets tired easily. And this one, well, he's not very good at finding the right things to eat. You gotta watch out for this one – she's feisty. And that one over there is so overconfident he's always running ahead of the flock. Each sheep has its own

personality, different strengths, different weaknesses, and a good shepherd will know what those different things are about his sheep because a good shepherd knows his (or her) sheep. In the same way, Jesus says that he knows you. “I know each one of you,” Jesus says, “and I know what each one of your personalities are like. I know your strengths, and I know your weaknesses.” Jesus really does know you. He knows you better than you know yourself, but it goes much deeper than that. When Jesus says that he knows you, it means much more than you and I can really comprehend.

The Bible says that Jesus knew each one of you even before the creation of the world. Even before the mountains were made, and the rivers and oceans were formed, Jesus knew you by name. Long before you were born, he knew who your parents would be. He knew what your genetic makeup would be. He knew what your family life was going to be like before you grew up as a child. Before you were even alive, before you were even conceived, Jesus knew all these things about you.

Now how could anyone know and remember everything about any one person let alone the billions of people alive on the earth today and the billions who have lived and died in ages past? Before the age of the computer this type of knowledge was unfathomable. You and I, living in the age of the computer, can just begin to take the initial steps to start to understand the enormously intricate and intricately enormous “mind” of God. He is able to know and remember everything, every fact, every bit of information, about every person. . .like a supercomputer only with much, much more speed (instantaneous speed) and much more capacity, unlimited capacity in fact.

This is just one more of the facets of God’s being that make him completely incomprehensible to us mere mortals. We can’t even begin to understand how God is who he is and what he is. I mean, how can one God be revealed in three persons, Father, Son, & Holy Spirit and yet be only one God and not three Gods? God is truly an entity far beyond us and far beyond our comprehension in his ability and his power and even in his state of existence. Yet this all-powerful entity, who is beyond human comprehension, has a deeply-held concern and a sincere interest in you.

He knows things about you that you don’t even know about yourself. He knows what you were like as a two-year old. Something you can’t remember. He knows how your brain works (or for many of us how our brain used to work). He knows what different things you are predisposed to, what different things you are inclined to both the good and the bad. Sometimes you hear people say, “I just found out something about myself the other day.” Jesus would say, “I already knew that about you,” because he knows you much better than you will ever know yourself.

What do you think Jesus’ opinion is, about you, since your life is an open book to him? Remember, he knows your every thought. All those things you keep to yourself, those secrets in your mind, he knows what those secrets are. And he knows your history, your “sin history.” He knows every sin you have committed in your life, every sin, even those sins you don’t want anyone to ever know about. But Jesus knows about them. He knows everything about you. Every

thought you have ever had, every word you have ever spoken, every deed you have ever done, even the secret things, Jesus knows.

What do you think his opinion is, about you? Not very good? “If Jesus knows me that well, he must not think very highly of me. He must see me as a very sinful person.” Remember, your whole life, including your private life, is an open book to him. Perhaps you might conclude, “Since this is true, then I’m lost. I’m going to hell. There is no way I could ever deserve heaven. There is no way Jesus would even want me in heaven with him, since he knows all these things that I have done in my life.”

Jesus does know you. But instead of wanting to punish you, look at what he does. In verse 15 of John chapter 10 Jesus says, “*I lay down my life for the sheep.*” Instead of punishing you, Jesus lays down his life for you. Do shepherds normally lay down their lives for their sheep? The answer is no. A shepherd will do the best he can to fight off any wild animals, but even a good shepherd isn’t going to just lay down his life, and let a wild animal kill him. Any normal shepherd would tell you, “Hey, it’s not worth it.” Besides, what good would it do? After the wild animal kills the shepherd, there’s no one there to protect the sheep!

But this is what Jesus did for you. Your old, evil foe Satan wants to drag you down to hell to live with him. “This person deserves hell!” he says to God. But Jesus steps forward. And Jesus doesn’t fight Satan. Instead, Jesus simply lays down his life. Satan thinks he has won. He thinks that he can attack you next. But then, Jesus rises from the dead, and that changes everything. By laying down his life for you, he took away the punishment that you deserve for your sins. By laying down his life for you, you no longer have to worry that God is going to punish you for your sin. It doesn’t work that way. Jesus has already been punished for you.

Romans 8:1 (NIV) . . . *there is now no condemnation* (no punishment) *for those who are in Christ Jesus.* Where did your punishment go? . . . *the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.* Isaiah 53:5 (NIV). And all of this comes to you through faith in Jesus. The Apostle Peter says it so clearly “. . . *everyone who believes in him* (Jesus) *receives forgiveness of sins through his name.*” Acts 10:43 (NIV). Your sins are forgiven, all of them. And in case you have any doubts, remember Jesus rose from the dead. That is proof to you that Jesus’ payment for your sins was acceptable to God. And that same faith in Jesus which makes you a forgiven child of God also makes you a sheep in the Good Shepherd’s flock.

Now, when Jesus says that he knows you, what that means is this. He doesn’t know you anymore as a sinner who deserves to be punished. When Jesus looks at you now, do you know what he sees? He sees you as someone who has had his or her sins taken away. He sees you as someone who has been forgiven. He sees you as someone who will not be punished, but instead, blessed by God the Father. Jesus sees you as a sheep that belongs in his flock, a sheep that he wants to take care of.

Remember, he is your shepherd. Today, in this world, he is watching over you. You're not all alone by yourself, even though it feels that way sometimes. Jesus is watching over you. At times, he may watch you as you travel to joyful places, times that are good, times of celebration. And, at times, your Shepherd may watch over you as you go to frightening places and times that seem bad. Some call these the "valleys" of life. Jesus, your shepherd, watches over you as you travel perhaps into a financial-problem valley in the years ahead, or into a health-problem-valley, or into an emotional or personal problem valley. Or, he may watch over you as you pass through the valley of the shadow of death. During those times, you may think to yourself, "Nobody knows what I'm going through. Nobody knows how I feel."

But Jesus says to you, "I know. I know my sheep, and I know how you feel. I know where you are, I'm watching over you." And you might be tempted to ask, "Why? Why are you letting me suffer in this financial problem valley, or in this health problem valley? Why? Are you punishing me for my sins?" And the Good Shepherd will say to you, "No, no. Remember, I laid down my life for you. I've already died for your sins. Your sins are gone. They're forgiven." "Then why are you letting me suffer?" you might ask. And Jesus will say to you, "It's because I know you." "Of all the places in the world for you to be, right now, this is what is best for you. Just trust me. I know you. I know you better than you know yourself. Trust me. I won't hurt you or harm you. When it's all over, you'll understand what I am doing. Just remember, I know you."

And so we follow him, as he leads us through this world. We trust him. We don't always understand him. But I don't think sheep ever really understand what their shepherd is doing. Don't you think that's true? Most of the time, sheep have no idea what their shepherd is doing, why the shepherd is taking them here, or leading them there. Sheep have no idea. But the shepherd knows his sheep, and he does what is best for them.

Jesus knows you. You and I often times have no idea why he leads us to the places he does. But we know that he loves us. He loves you with a love that you will never be able to fully understand. That love caused him to lay down his life for you. Today he reminds you that he knows you. What a comfort that is. As sheep of the good shepherd all we really need to do is trust him and follow him, trust him and follow him . . . all the way to eternal life.

Let us pray.

O Precious Savior,

We give all honor and praise and glory to you, our Good Shepherd. In your love for us, you have carried our sins to the cross and paid the dreadful penalty we deserved. In love you have sent your Spirit into our hearts with the gift of faith that gives us the forgiveness of sins and makes us sheep of your fold.

Let us always remember that you watch over us as a loving shepherd, turning away what is harmful and always doing what is best for us. Keep us in your fold and use us to lead others to you that all may join with us around your throne in heaven for eternity. Amen.

