

A Sermon Preached by
Fr. Ralph Osborne for the Fourth Sunday of Easter, Year C
April 25, 2010 at St. Thomas Church, Menasha, Wisconsin |
[Acts 9:36-43](#) | [Psalm 23](#) | [Revelation 7:9-17](#) | [John 10:22-30](#)

Whenever the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd comes up in our readings, I wonder if there isn't a better metaphor for our more urban life. Not too many of us are up to date on sheep and shepherding. What activity or livelihood could be used to show us what a caring Lord and Savior Jesus is? I don't think anything with Sturgeons in it would work. In the days Jesus walked on earth, everyone was familiar with sheep and shepherds. In the Middle East today, you can still see shepherds in the fields, but here, we don't see them very often. You don't see spots on the news highlighting the life of sheep or shepherds. They are not in our thoughts everyday like they were back then.

In our gospel lesson, Jesus is in the midst of one of the most famous of his discourses. He is describing Himself as the Good Shepherd. Churches have stained glass windows with Jesus holding a lamb. We know that we are the lamb he is holding. This pastoral image of Jesus is important for us to hold onto. It is a picture of his love for us, his sheep. It is telling us of great love and care. The image includes the self-sacrificing of the good shepherd.

So, is it possible to update the image? I am the good kennel operator doesn't get there. I love my dog, but dogs do not have the same importance in our lives that sheep did in Jesus' day. I am the good cattle rancher doesn't do it either. I am the good dairy farmer? Milk is pretty important. Maybe today we have to get out of the realm of animals completely. I am the good day care provider. Our children are very important to us. We surely know the difference between a good care provider and a bad one. We want someone who is willing to sacrifice themselves to protect our children. Well, think about it and get back to me if you have an image today that gets at the truth Jesus was teaching about himself.

Last week, Jesus told Peter and us, to feed His sheep. He wants us to shepherd or tend His sheep. This week, we are the sheep and Jesus is our shepherd. We are the vulnerable ones under the care of our Lord. We are invited to trust the love and care of this wonderful and loving shepherd. Sheep love to eat green grass. When they are not eating, they love to sleep in that green grass. So far, I'm liking it. I am getting a picture of provision and comfort. Life is good under the care of the good shepherd. That being the case, what does trust have to do with it? There is a southern gospel song that says, "God is good, yes he is. He's good all the time." What's to trust when things are good?

The Shepherd is Good but life is not always good. We read books about why bad things happen to good people. We know so many people who have trials and even temptations. If we haven't had very many of those trials or temptations, we count ourselves fortunate or even blessed. Down deep we know that any of those things could happen to us. Trust is especially important during difficult times. Our second reading is a good example. It is a passage that is often read at funerals. We are given a glimpse of the end times. A countless multitude is singing praise to God and someone comes up the John, the writer of the book of Revelation and asks him who all these folks are that are dressed in white robes. John pleads ignorance and tells the man that he is the one who knows who they are. The elder tells John and us who they are. They are the ones who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. They will hunger no more and thirst no more. In fact, even the sun won't burn them because the Lamb will be their shepherd.

Now we are challenged about how to look at this promise. Is it only a glimpse of heaven, or does it also give us a promise for today? Do we just get by as best we can on our own and hope for the best in heaven? I believe that John was given this revelation for the good of the people who would read it. It not only gave them a brief picture of heaven, but it also gave them a promise of deliverance, soon. It brought to their minds and to ours, the journey of the Exodus. God will part the waters of our lives that separate us from peace and joy. The Shepherd who loves us will provide for us. We may cry out, "how long oh Lord?" but help will come.

God knows all about our pain. The conclusion of our second reading confirms it. After all that vision about multitudes and singing and ordeals and caring, we are told that God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. God knows we cry. In case you didn't know this, God hears our cries. Think of a parent who hears their child cry. It makes them jump. They know the sound of their child's cry and they respond. Our cries move God. This is a theme given over and over again in the bible.

We are invited to trust the Good shepherd; in good times and bad. We are to be the sheep that know the voice of Jesus. When we follow Him, we go through our trials and end up in good pasture because He has spoken; we have heard his voice and followed. Just like a parent can hear the cry of their own children so clearly, the child knows the voice of their parent. We are encouraged to know the voice of Jesus like this.