

Fourth Sunday Easter 2021

John 10:11-18

The obligations of a Good Shepherd are made clear in our chapter of John. Jesus is defending himself *against the blind leaders of Israel*, who like the wicked shepherds in the book of Ezekiel, failed to look after the flock put in their care. Jesus had just healed a man born blind; his opponents instead of rejoicing over this victory of the light over darkness, denied that the cure had ever taken place and became spiritually blind themselves.

In today's passage we distinguish three characteristics of the Good Shepherd. First, he is ready to lay down his life for his sheep, in contrast to the hireling who runs away at danger. He repeats this three times. These predictions of the Passion of the Lord include the reassurance that he will lay down his life in order to take it up again.

Secondly, the good Shepherd knows his sheep and knows the Father. John has given us examples of how Jesus knows his own, at times even before they have met him. Jesus knew the Father before the world was made. His followers will know the Father if they know Jesus. As their leader, Peter is to know those whom he is to serve.

Thirdly, the Good Shepherd is to be a principle of unity. There are other sheep to come into the fold. These may be those whom the apostles will later convert. They may be people like the Greeks who were soon to come seeking Jesus. They may be those who belong to other Christian groupings, perhaps including those who have broken away from the original group. The self-description of Jesus as the Good Shepherd informs us not only about how he understood his own relationship to his followers but offers a challenging model to all those who would exercise authority in the Christian community in the future.

The Good Shepherd is ready to lay down his life for his sheep, and he knows his sheep who also knows the Father, and he is a principle of unity. This is emphasized by the hireling who runs away at the first sign of danger because he works for pay, and also emphasized by the phrase, "I know mine and mine know me."

“We don’t have to go far for lessons in **radical availability**. Jesus is our model on the path to giving ourselves away generously. If folks are sick, bring a healing presence to them. When you encounter the poor, be a cause for their joy. When someone is grieving, comfort them. In the face of injustice, defend the oppressed. In the presence of a great lie, tell the truth with directness and simplicity. When the sheep are in danger, protect them with your life.”

Our commentator, Alice Camille, also writes, “**Radical availability isn’t for religious pretenders**, obviously. If we are satisfied with belonging to a church and having the right answers, then discipleship with its passionate commitments and responsibilities, won’t have much appeal. The hired hand in the Good Shepherd parable worked for pay and without conviction. He was willing to let the wolf have the sheep while he clocked out. Jesus asks us to take this world and our lives more seriously. Give yourself, heart, soul, and strength, to this sacred journey.”

I believe that most of us here at SFDS do take lives seriously or we wouldn’t have so many wonderful programs that we support and are involved in, like the Mercy Neighborhood Ministries, the Help Program, the three Over-the-Rhine ministries, our music ministry and cleaning ministry, our wedding hosts ministry, and so forth, but, more importantly, **our Elementary School**. I am sure you have heard the slogan, “You can give the hungry fish, but if you teach them to fish, they can feed themselves.” A good elementary education establishes good habits early in life to help our students succeed after they graduate no matter where they continue their life journey. This has been the foundational Marianist charism, life-long learning, and formation!

The story of the Good Shepherd isn’t just about our leaders, it is also about all Christians **who seriously follow the Lord**. Others are watching what we do, listening to what we say, and are attentive to how we say it. They will see if we practice what we believe, especially our children. We need to remind ourselves that we are Christians 24/7. At one point in our faith development, we will have to decide to stop being a sheep and to start becoming a shepherd. If we are willing to lay down our lives for our sheep, then we are willing to commit our lives to serving Christ through others.