

Different Shepherds
Acts 20:17-35
May 8, 2021

Many times with texts like the 23rd Psalm we look at the shepherd and how he handles the sheep. Have you ever thought about it from the sheep's point of view? What does the sheep know? All he knows is that the shepherd leads him to those green pastures. If the shepherd is a good shepherd we know he will lead them to green, lush pastures and then take them to clean, cool water to drink and then allows them to rest, chewing their cud, as they further process their morning's grazing. That is what the sheep of a good shepherd think but what about sheep that have a shepherd that isn't the best, maybe just new to the job?

The sheep with the second shepherd, if he isn't a good shepherd may find themselves in not so good of a pasture. The shepherd may be lazy and will just lead them to picked over pasture, thinking what is there is good enough. Then, because it was late when they got to pasture and not that plentiful, the shepherd may have called it a day, earlier than he should have and brought them to water but then, instead of letting them rest and process the little they ate, he drives them back to the pen as he has other things on his mind to do. He could also leave them on the sparse pasture longer, so long that by the time they got their drink, it was time to get back.

What would be the conversation if those two sheep got together? Oh, they could talk about the day they had but one sheep would dream of a shepherd like the other and the other would give thanks for having a shepherd that he had taken for granted his whole life, not realizing there were shepherds like the other sheep had that left so much to be desired.

Paul is leaving to go to Jerusalem. He doesn't know the future but he has been told by the Holy Spirit that he will have to deal with afflictions and imprisonment awaiting him there even though he doesn't know the full extent of what will happen.

Paul is thinking he will not be coming back. As he goes to Jerusalem, things are going to happen that will prevent him from coming back, more than likely thinking he will die there as some like James have already died as we learned last week.

Paul realizes how much he went through to bring them the Gospel of Jesus and now he has to trust them and the Lord that the Lord will watch over them and as he gives his final instructions in the care for those who do not know Jesus or are weak in

the faith. He knows they are in danger of turning away from Jesus and His work on their behalf.

Paul knows they have much to give. Paul has given them much as he did not cease day and night admonishing every one of them with tears as he declared the full counsel of God.

We can see that “full counsel” as Paul using both law and gospel as he witnessed and taught them of what Jesus had done for them. He uses the term overseer but with the other lessons for today, that overseer is the shepherd that cares for the flock of sheep that he labels them as.

Jesus says that His works done in His Father’s name bears witness to who he is but like the sheep of the one shepherd, they do not respond to the shepherd of the other sheep. Each shepherd has his own way of talking, of calling of moving around his sheep. They know if a stranger is around. They will not listen to the stranger. The stranger will have to take time to do those things that will build trust with the sheep not of his sheep fold.

Paul is wanting those left behind to not forget what they had learned from him and from Jesus. They had come to know Paul and his teaching, and had gotten comfortable with him, even when he brought down the law on them. They grew to understand that what Paul was doing was caring for them but was also moving them to the point that they could take over when he left.

Paul is leaving and now they are to take up the torch and shine the light of Jesus to others in Ephesus, who do not know Paul or especially Jesus as the one they are to look to now that Paul has left.

Paul is putting it all in the hands of the Elders of the church. Paul leaves, declaring he has given them the charge to give as he gave. He says they will be blessed as they give of what they have been given.

When you think of it, what happens when you tell others of what you have been taught about being a Christian and about the reason for the hope you have? When you talk to them over time, what is it like to deal with them? There is that back and forth as you describe what you know.

There is another challenge that Paul has had to deal with and that is the Jews who plotted against the work of Paul. Now, they were going to have to deal with those Jews who would try to persuade them that Paul had abandoned them and that they

really couldn't count on what Paul had taught them anyway. They would pull out all the stops to try to dissuade them from continuing on in what they had come to know as the truth. He even pointed out that it was not just those Jews but some, even from their own ranks would take advantage of the situation and try to draw some away unto themselves, leading them away from the truth. They needed to be aware of where the assaults would come.

They had a weapon though the enemies didn't have and that was the Holy Spirit to keep them in the faith. The Jews had failed with Paul, they were now about to fail with those elders that Paul left behind because they were willing to work hard in the way that Paul had taught them as they were now going to those who needed to hear and see the message at work in the rest of the city.

With all that lay before them, things were going to be a little different. Even though it was going to be the same message, the way that the message would go out would have the fingerprints of the elders on it. It would be more than Paul's message, it would be their message. They would have to put it in such a way that they were part of it.

We know Paul talked of being the Pharisee of Pharisees, trained under Gamaliel. He had all that to draw from. The elders could have come up with all sorts of excuses but the ball was now in their court. They may not have had as much of a background or education as Paul but the Lord was going to work with them, lead them into the lives of others to proclaim to them, Jew and Gentile alike that **all** had a Savior in Jesus.

You have that same message for those in your lives. You have what you need to proclaim the kingdom that has come down to each of you.

You may be thinking that you are not one of the elders in charge. That is their responsibility. They are the ones who are to watch over the church to make sure things run smoothly and in order and yet, you being the church with you being one of many members have been given what you received from the Lord and that is to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

Paul, the shepherd of these sheep was under the shepherd of all sheep. He was leaving and yet, in a way, they weren't his sheep any longer, no they were now going to be under some new shepherds who would carry on. Those shepherds would go about the ministry before them. They would take from what Jesus and Paul provided and make it know to their world even if a challenge arose from outside or from inside.

If we think about it, what did Jesus start out with? 12 guys, one of whom would betray Him. 12 to how many today? None of those 12 are alive today doing the work of the Lord in our lives. No, it was given for many others to take it up and bring it to a new set of people who needed to hear of the Good News of Jesus and His work for them on the cross and in heaven.

The elders took from what they learned from what Jesus did and what Paul had taught and made it a part of their lives so that others could continue on. Much like a mother who teaches those under her care what it means to be a good citizen and Christian. There comes a day when the child leaves home and goes out into the world where they put into practice what they had grown to know.

We think of the Church being the bride of Christ. If the Church is the bride and Christ is her husband, the who are we? Children, who will do what is common to their name, Christian.

What is there in that name, "Christian"? They are a sheep of a different breed. Their actions and even their voice is distinct. They are part of the Shepherd's family. The Shepherd cares for His sheep so much so that He died for them only to rise again three days later. He rose and now rules as King.

He has left the world but has sent His Spirit to come to live in all those who have been baptized into His name. He lives in us but then in order to strengthen the faith He has given us, He provides His Word and the Sacrament of His Supper where we get to eat and to drink of His very body and blood.

We have this account to tell. It is the gospel of the grace of God for all people, not just some. So, every person we meet, every person we get to know, every person that we call friend is one who needs to hear the of the hope we have.

That hope is so easy to hide, to keep to oneself. Any challenge to us, either from outside or within can keep us silent, make us retreat into the safety of our own little world.

Jesus left Paul, Paul left the elders in Ephesus and a child who grows into adulthood is left by their Mother to deal with the world out there, not alone but with the Holy Spirit to testify of the Good News of Jesus. Yes, it may take some shepherding to help others to learn of Jesus. Their shepherding may not be the same in all instances but as the Word remains true, Jesus will bestow His Holy Spirit on bothers so that they too can go on to shepherd still others with their green pastures and still waters.