



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

Sunday, April 29, 2007

#### Easter 4

Today is called Good Shepherd Sunday and our focus is on Jesus as the good shepherd. How many of you here today would claim to be a sheep of the flock of the good shepherd? Yes. All of you. Even those who did not put up their hand. In fact all Christians in every denomination would make the same claim to be a sheep in the Flock of the Good Shepherd. We all recognize Jesus, we hear his voice, we follow him, we believe in him and for the most part do what he asks us to do.

But there are 2 questions that really bug us about all this. The first is- why is it that there are some who are not in the fold? If Jesus died for the whole world, and for the people of the whole world, to tell them they are a child of God, then why is it the children of God do not follow Jesus? If people do not follow Jesus it is not because Jesus is not the shepherd. It is because people have chosen not to be sheep.

The good shepherd never changes; Jesus is always the good shepherd. It is by choice that people are not sheep. Yet often the gospel that we as sheep adopt, and what we focus on, is not one of proclaiming Christ as we know him, but how those outside the fold are not really sheep. We would rather talk about how others are not sheep of the fold than live a life that proclaims we follow, not just a good shepherd, but a great shepherd. We who call ourselves sheep are the only living gospels that our good shepherd has. Unfortunately the love of God and the care of the shepherd are not always experienced by some miraculous osmosis that God gives to people. The love of God and the care of the shepherd is usually experienced when someone says a kind word, someone offers a little encouragement, someone acts in a way that speaks of kindness. When somebody does something or says something that reflects a unity of relationship with God. In doing that we have shown that we have heard his voice, are known by him and we follow Christ. And it may be that instead of trying to brow beat people into the kingdom by threats, by guilt and by fear, we need to be proclaiming the Christ we believe in who loves and cares for his sheep. And I say the Christ we believe in because we know that different sheep have different beliefs about the Shepherd and about God. And that leads to the second question in all of this. What about those who are sheep yet believe something different to us about Jesus?

It is quite clear that in the day of Jesus it was the shepherd who found it necessary to divide the sheep from the goats. The sheep didn't do it. The shepherd did. What that tells us is that we need to be careful in case we are the ones becoming divisive in our thinking. Of course our decision about who Jesus is, what Jesus is, how Jesus would have responded in circumstances we each face, will be much different to other people. That is why we have denominations. Our vision is different. Our understanding is different. Sometimes in the differences and because of the differences we become

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*Established in 1847*

210 North Main Street Versailles, KY 40383 859.873.3481 [info@stjohnsky.com](mailto:info@stjohnsky.com) [www.stjohnsky.com](http://www.stjohnsky.com)



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

Sunday, April 29, 2007

like the Jews who wanted a clear cut answer when they asked Jesus to tell them plainly. Tell us plainly Jesus, would make it so much easier for us. But he doesn't.

In all the times he was asked to tell plainly, or to give a sign, or are you the messiah, he always referred to what he had done. To look at his works. The sick were healed, sins forgiven, dead raised, people fed, women and children given new places in society. Their were new challenges to understand faith and there were new requests to trust. These and others eventually became hallmarks of a relationship with the shepherd. The Shepherd. The Christ.

So let's be very clear. There is no warrant in this text for the sheep to be dividing the flock. That is always, has always, and will always be the job of the shepherd. The will and the purpose of the sheep are to live a relationship that reflects a unity with the shepherd as we understand him. And it is evident that there are many understandings of Jesus. What is important is that we are true to our understanding and are not critical of others. Remember there is no warrant in this text of scripture for us to be doing the dividing of who we think are sheep or who we may think are the goats. THAT IS THE JOB OF THE SHEPHERD.

And despite what we may think, it is quite evident from the vision of John that at the throne of the shepherd there was a great multitude from every nation, not just some, from all tribes, people and tongues, not just some. My belief is that we all may be a little surprised by who we see in heaven. The only one that is not the surprise is the shepherd who will guide us to the springs of living water and wipe away every tear from our eye.  
Amen.

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*Established in 1847*

210 North Main Street Versailles, KY 40383 859.873.3481 [info@stjohnsky.com](mailto:info@stjohnsky.com) [www.stjohnsky.com](http://www.stjohnsky.com)