

## Sermon for Easter 4 – May 3, 2020

(by Fr. Ron Barnes)

Several years ago, in the Diocese of the Virgin Islands, I was teaching in a parish church where on the left-hand side of the Altar, there was a life-sized painting of Jesus the Good Shepherd. You have all seen pictures like that. Jesus is seen holding a lamb, and there are several sheep around him. In this case, the picture that I saw showed Jesus as Black. No surprise in that since all the pictures around the church showed Jesus as Black. The 500 people in the church were black, and the priest was black, so the picture really fit in that congregation.

But not too many of us have ever seen a Shepherd, black white or any other colour. If we have, we probably see the shepherd whistling to his favourite sheep dogs, who were escorting the sheep. But that is not the way it was done in Jesus day.

In His day, there were no sheep dogs. The Shepherd led the sheep out to pasture, the Shepherd guarded the sheep, the Shepherd led his sheep into a sheepfold at night, a sheepfold that was simply a low wall with one entrance. And at night the Shepherd lay down to sleep in the entrance, to prevent the sheep from wandering out or a wolf or thief from stepping in. It was a 24-hour job, caring, protecting and knowing them all by name. The sheep recognised his voice, and followed him, their Shepherd. Another shepherd they would not follow.

So, when Jesus called Himself the Good Shepherd, every Jew of His day knew exactly what He was saying.

But how does that apply to us today? Jesus is saying that He knows all of us who belong to Him. He is saying that He cares for us, loves us, and feeds us. He is saying that He leads us each day, that He protects us from daily temptation, and never leaves us. He is with us by day, and by night. He calls us to know Him and leads us on our Journey of Salvation. He feeds us with His Grace and Power in the Sacraments and guides us as we read the Scriptures. He is there to heal our problems, forgive our sins, to fill us with His Love and bring us into the company of others in the Church where we can learn and grow. Jesus is our Good Shepherd.

All that is nice to know. But how does it help us in living the Faith. Well it gives us a pattern to live, a manner with which we need to act in our daily life.

If Jesus is our Good Shepherd, then that is an illustration as to how we should be acting towards others. We can begin to care for others, to show love for others, to make sure that others are fed and clothed. Instead of worrying about ourselves, we need to turn our attention on the needs of others around us. The Lord will look after us; it is our job to look after our friends, our co-workers, our neighbours. That may mean leading someone to Christ, or providing food for the hungry, or phoning someone that is lonely, or doing the shopping for an invalid. It means following Jesus in shepherding others, as He does for us.

We can keep this always in mind by reciting the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm:

*The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not be in want....  
He revives my soul and guides me along right pathways for His name's sake.....  
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell  
in the house of the Lord for ever. Amen*

As Jesus loves us, so we need to learn to love others --- not just our family but those around us, even those who tend to be unloveable. They need it most, and the Lord has asked us to be a shepherd to all.

Let us pray:

*God of loving care, you spread before us the table of life,  
And give us the cup of salvation to drink.  
Keep us always in the sheepfold of your Son Jesus Christ,  
Our Saviour and our Good Shepherd. Amen*

(Fr. Ron Barnes aohc)