

## **"Broken People: Sheep Without a Shepherd"**

**Scripture References: Mark 6:30-34**

**Sunday, July 22, 2018**

Those of you who have grown up in the Lutheran Church are probably familiar with the different responses that are spoken in the traditional worship service. For example, when a Scripture reading is finished, the reader says, "This is the Word of the Lord," to which the congregation replies... ("Thanks be to God.") Another response that you hear quite often is when the pastor says, "The Lord be with you." The congregation then responds with... ("And also with you.")

Well, there was this Lutheran pastor who began each worship service by coming before the congregation and saying, "The Lord be with you." Of course the congregation replied, "And also with you." This one Sunday though, the PA system was broken. So, the first thing that the pastor said as he came before the congregation was, "There's something wrong with the microphone," to which the congregation replied, "And also with you."

Well, as funny as that may be, it is also the truth. Unfortunately, there is something wrong with all of us. We are broken. It's a brokenness that sin has caused, a brokenness that makes us feel empty, lost, alone, and so far away from God.

Look again at what Mark's Gospel tells us here. The twelve had just returned from their mission trip, where they preached God's Word, cast out demons, and healed many who were sick. So, Jesus encouraged them to come with Him to a quiet place and get some well-deserved rest. However, when they arrived, there was a huge crowd waiting for them. That's when Mark tells us, "When He went ashore He saw a great crowd, and He had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd." (Mark 6:34).

Now, that's quite a description, isn't it? "They were like sheep without a shepherd." Basically, Jesus saw them as broken people, and He had such compassion for them. Well, this is what I would like to take a look at today.

You see, I deal with broken people pretty much on a daily basis; people who feel empty and alone; people who are looking for some kind of direction, some kind of answers; people who are very much like sheep without a shepherd. Some of them have fears and anxiety about the future, or about aging and dying. Some of them have a very difficult time getting their act together, their life together, and as a result, they are quite self-destructive. Some of them feel such heartache and emptiness over losing a loved one. Now, these are just a few examples, but they show us the results of sin in this world and in our lives, and how weak, and vulnerable, and uncertain, and insecure that can make us. My point is, we really are like sheep without a shepherd.

This is why, even though I've discussed sheep with you many times, I want to take another look at them, just to show you the truth of Jesus' statement here. So, first of all, as we all know, sheep are definitely prone to wander. The shepherd has to keep a watchful eye on his sheep, because invariably, they will wander off and get into some serious trouble. Well, don't people do pretty much the same thing? Oh, how we just love to wander away from the Lord and do our own thing. And why is that? Because we want to be the ruler of our life. We want to be in control. We want to be our own god. You see, that is that old Adam and Eve disease, sin, taking hold.

I'll give you an example. About a week ago, Kim and I were watching a travel show on PBS, hosted by Rick Steves, who, by the way, is Lutheran. This week he was visiting Norway. Well, as he was describing the people, he brought up that the state religion in Norway is Lutheran, but most people don't attend church. Instead, their religion has really become their political system. In a sense, that has become their god. In fact, he spent quite a bit of time talking about this and interviewing people about this.

Well, when the program was over, Kim and I looked at each other and commented on how sad that made us feel. Neither of us were angry with these people. We just felt so badly for them. They are missing out on so much, because like sheep, they love to wander.

And we see the same thing all around us; in our society, in our family, and maybe even in our own lives. This is simply part our sinful human nature, to look for something more, something better, something that will satisfy our cravings. We are, in fact, looking for greener pastures. So, we wander away from the Lord, our Shepherd. And one thing that I have noticed over the years is that there are a whole lot of people who have no interest at all in returning to their Shepherd. They are perfectly happy chasing after whatever it is they are chasing. And that is so sad.

Now, another point that I want to bring up is that sheep are quite fragile. I want you to listen to what one expert writes about sheep, "No matter how many times you bring wayward sheep back, they are prone to wander off again, because they can't learn from their mistakes. That's important, because sheep are defenseless and dependent. They don't have much of a bite, no natural defense – no claws, no horns, no fangs, not even a stink bag like a skunk. To make matters worse, they are top-heavy, and their legs are spindly. This makes them slow. Plus, they have no camouflage, so when they are being chased by a wolf, they are out of luck. Sheep are also susceptible to all kinds of diseases. They will even eat too much if you let them, and then get sick. Finally, sheep are easily frightened and confused. It doesn't take much to scramble the simple mental yoke of a nervous sheep. They've even been known to plunge straight over the edge of a high precipice in a panic, one following right after another."

Folks, this is who we are compared with; very fragile, vulnerable, dumb, wandering sheep. And personally, I believe this is a very accurate comparison. It's definitely not flattering, but it's accurate.

Well, this is why it is so vitally important for us to fully grasp the amazing grace of God. In John's Gospel, Jesus says, "I am the Good Shepherd. I know My own and My own know Me." (John 10:14).

You see, we may indeed be fragile, vulnerable, dumb, wandering sheep, but we have a Shepherd, who not only has such great compassion for us, but who has such love for us that He fought for us and laid down His life for us on the cross, so that sin and death and hell would not tear us apart and devour us. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, the One we can count on to always be there for us, even at those times when we feel lost, alone, afraid. Now folks, this really is not a difficult concept for us to understand and take hold of. It's simply a matter of lifting our eyes up to the Lord and looking to Him. That's when we see Him as our Shepherd, our Great Defender. And that's what brings comfort and peace to us.

Let me explain. A gentleman by the name of Allen Emery wrote a book entitled, "A Turtle on the Fence Post." In this book, he tells of the night he spent on the Texas plains with a shepherd who was keeping 2,000 sheep. The shepherd prepared a bonfire for cooking supper and providing warmth. The sheepdogs laid down near the fire as the stars filled the sky.

Suddenly, Emery heard the unmistakable wail of a coyote, which was answered by another call from the other side of the range. The dogs were not patrolling at that moment, and the coyotes seemed to notice that. Rising quickly, the shepherd tossed some logs on the fire.

When Emery then looked out at the sheep he saw thousands of little lights. Emery then wrote, "I realize that these were reflections of the fire in the eyes of the sheep. In the midst of danger, the sheep were not looking out into the darkness, but they were keeping their eyes set toward the shepherd."

Folks, that's what you and I need to do; keep our eyes set on our Shepherd, and our ears opened to listen to His voice. Again, going back to John's Gospel, Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." (John 10:27).

So often in this world of ours, the noise of life muffles the Shepherd's voice. But understand, our Shepherd is definitely calling to us.

And, boy oh boy, do we ever need to listen to His voice. Because the truth is, we can't always see Him, when we are dealing with serious issues or desires in our life, we can't always see that our Lord is right here with us. Here again, we are very much like sheep.

You see, sheep are very short-sighted. In fact, they can only see about 6 feet in front of them. That is why it is so important for them to listen to the voice of their shepherd.

Well, you and I can also be very short-sighted. So often, all we can see is ourselves and what we are dealing with in our life, or what desires we have that is leading us to wander off. A lot of times we do lose sight of the Lord in our life. That is why we also need to listen to the voice of our Shepherd. He is right here with us, even though it may be hard for us to see Him. We just need to listen to Him, to His Word, and actually trust that He is right here, and He has everything well in hand. So please, open your eyes, open your ears, open your life to Him.

Look it, I may not know where you are at in your faith relationship with the Lord. But wherever you are at, whatever you are struggling with, whatever problem is threatening you, whatever sin is haunting you, I am asking you to be like sheep again; be like those thousands of sheep on that Texas plain, and turn your eyes upon Jesus, your Shepherd, your Savior, and let Him take it all. Trust in the One who has such compassion and love for you. You may feel broken, lost, alone, but trust in Him, trust in His voice and find comfort and peace and direction there.

There's an old hymn that I think most of you are familiar with, "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing." The third verse is really a prayer asking God for His grace to bind us to Him, so we won't ever wander away from Him. I would like to conclude with this today:

*"Oh, to grace how great a debtor  
Daily I'm constrained to be;  
Let that grace now, like a fetter  
Bind my wand'ring heart to Thee:  
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it;  
Prone to leave the God I love.  
Here's my heart, O take and seal it,  
Seal it for Thy courts above." Amen.*

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