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Fearless Sheep  
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This morning, if you were asked, “What’s the most Frequent Command in the Bible,” what would you say? Well, of course the most Important Command in the Bible is to Love the Lord, your God with all your Heart, and with all your Soul and with all your Mind. But what is the most Frequent Command in the Bible?

The most Frequent Command is for us to NOT BE AFRAID. TO FEAR NOT. That’s right. It’s a command that appears over 100 times in our Bible. But this command doesn’t mean that there are no dangers out there. In fact, it’s a command that also comes with a solution to fear. More often than not, the command for us to not be afraid, is followed by an action taken by God.

For example, in first book of our Bible, the Lord says in Genesis 15, Fear not, I am your shield. And in Luke 12, Jesus tells us, “To not be afraid, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” The Good News is that we are never lost or alone in Jesus; and, this morning in our Gospel Reading, we again have proof for us NOT TO FEAR as Jesus identifies Himself as our Good Shepherd.

The Good Shepherd who lays down his life for His sheep. is in relationship with His sheep, and who brings unity to His sheep. We, the believers in Christ are His Sheep. We are the ones who come to trust in the protection of The Good Shepherd. His Sheep are fearless. Yes, to be a believer is to be fearless. You see, it’s more than a command, it’s our response to His caring and protecting love for us. Especially during times of hardships, sufferings, of financial struggles, and pandemic disorders. But before we go any further, we need to put our passage into context with a little background.

You see, throughout the beginning chapters of John’s gospel, we see the unfolding revelation of God’s grace that began in these initial stories of: the woman at the well, the cleansing of 10 lepers, the healing of the woman with the issue of blood, and the rising of Jairus’ daughter. THESE stories that we have studied and preached on over the past FOUR MONTHS have revealed God’s gracious love for us - the Shepherd’s care over His flock; and, these accounts have led Jesus to be in confrontation with the religious leaders of Israel. In fact, by now, the religious leaders have tried at least three times to bring about His death. As they are deeply distressed by Jesus, His message, His miracles, and the CHANGE He is bringing.

Just before this passage, of The Good Shepherd, the Jewish authorities had cast out from the synagogue the man who was healed from his blindness by Jesus. When this happens, we begin to see a body of disciples following Jesus. Jesus and His Flock are now clearly separate from the Jewish Religious Leaders and their Flock. This break between Jesus and the Jewish authorities is now characterize in our readings. In our two readings we find a contrast between good shepherds and false shepherds, and we also find a contrast between FEARLESS SHEEP and FEARFUL SHEEP.

Here in John's Gospel - Is the FIRST TIME Jesus uses this metaphor of SHEPHERD and SHEEP. Jesus is now appropriating divine language by referring to Himself as the shepherd of the flock. We know in the Old Testament the leaders and care-takers of the people are called shepherds, especially Moses and David. We hear in Psalm 77 "God, You, You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses." In Psalm 78 we're told, "The Lord chose David as his servant and brought David to be the shepherd of his people, and David shepherded them with integrity of heart. BUT IT IS GOD, WHO IS THE SHEPHERD OF EXCELLENCE as we are told in Psalm 80, and in Psalm 23, where we often recite these comforting words, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." Throughout our Bible, Shepherding is used as an image for God providing His care and His protection for His people.

Jesus is not only appropriating this divine language; He is claiming such a role in a way unlike anything seen before. By using this language, Jesus is claiming divine messiahship, which we see repeatedly in John, Chapter 10. Look with me in verse 25, the Pharisees asked, "IF you are the Messiah tell us plainly, for how long are you going to keep us in suspense?" Jesus answers, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my FATHER'S name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep." When Jesus claims to be the shepherd he is claiming that He is the Messiah, that He has come, and in Him, God Himself, has come to Shepherd his people. His people are His SHEEP.

Not only is Jesus appropriating divine language in the use of the Shepherd and Sheep metaphor. He is also using the I AM identification. Jesus says, "I AM The Good Shepherd." Jesus pointing back to Moses and the Burning Bush. The I Am is one of the most famous phrases of this event. In Exodus, Chapter 3, Moses is asking God, for His name.

He's asking" what name should I use if the people of Israel ask, who sent me?" God said, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I Am has sent me to you.'" The I Am, having the meaning of being the name of God. Here, Within John's gospel, Jesus uses the I AM, in Greek, ego eimi, four times. Jesus says, I am the way, the truth, and the life. I am the resurrection and the life. I am the door. I am the Good Shepherd. All affirmations of His deity. When Jesus says, I Am the Good Shepherd, He uses the word Good, as if to say, "in contrast to all the bad ones."

In Greek there are two words for "good." One is AGATHOS, meaning Good in a broad and general sense and even describing one's ethical virtue. It's a familiar word found throughout the New Testament. Here, Jesus uses the other word for Good. The Greek word, ka-los. It's a more encompassing word and it implies the opposite of Kakos, which is "to be bad." This form of Good, in its context, refers to that which is beautiful, noble, honorable, worthy of praise.

In other words, Jesus is fulfilling his job as a shepherd in such fashion that this Ka-los, this form of the word, His fullness of Goodness, is imaged in our minds.

In Jesus, we see the divine character of God Almighty, and WHAT we see is beautiful; Ka-los. Such a vision of God's character is to be the heart of all true SHEPHERDS. In fact, it is the imagine of Christ, His kalos, that all believers, that all disciples of Christ seek. It's because of this Goodness, that The Good Shepherd lays down his life for His sheep, that He is in relationship with His sheep, and that He brings unity to His sheep. In verse 11 Jesus tells us that

the shepherd, the good one, "lays down His life for the sheep." Earlier, in verse 10, Jesus has just said, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full. Jesus has promised life to the full and now he says this life comes through His death. We Hear this again in verses 11 and 15. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep; and Jesus says, "I lay down my life for the sheep."

Not only is this a pointer to His Death and Saving work on the cross for our salvation, it's a message to all followers of Christ at any level of ministry. Whether you're a Sunday School Teacher, a Life Group Leader, a Prayer Minister, a vestry member, whatever your call, we are to sacrifice for others. We are to lay down our lives, pick up our cross, put aside our pride and when we do this our lives become a LIVING SACRIFICE - through WHOM - God can reach out to His sheep, to comfort and to protect them; and to unify them.

Saint Peter fully understood this. In First Peter 5, Peter addresses the elders of the church. He addresses those disciples who are making disciples and refers to them as under-shepherds. Know this: If you are witnessing Christ to others, then you too are an under-shepherd, under The Good Shepherd. Peter tells us to be an example of Christ Jesus to the flock.

Peter saying, "Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another," for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." This is the way of Shepherding that all Disciples of Christ are to move into, and it is the way that unifies believers for our collective purposes in God's kingdom work... and it is the way that leads us to be fearless. Because it leads each of us towards a personal relationship with Christ where we become bold and fearless under His Shepherding.

In our reading, Jesus says, in verse 14, I know my own and my own know me. Again, the imagery that Jesus is giving is one of sheep who have spent time with the Shepherd. They've been out in the pasture grazing and heard the Shepherd's voice. Heard the Shepherd laughing, singing, calling out to keep them away from danger. When you learn His voice, you know it from the other voices that would lead you astray - the other voices that instill fear and scatter the sheep. The voice of the shepherd it lives in us through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit's indwelling presence in our hearts is there to discern and confirm the word and the truth that is spoken to us. We come to recognize His voice, and what is NOT HIS VOICE, in the things we hear, in the books we read, what's in the newspaper and on TV. Sheep know the Shepherd's voice; they know what it sounds like and they respond to His loving care and protection finding Peace. Yes, finding THAT Peace that surpasses all understanding.

Later in John 14, Jesus says, Peace is what I leave with you; Do NOT be Worried; Do Not be afraid. (Be fearless.) Yet, as we know, it's not uncommon for many of us to be shaken and scared in these times. Just last week, an old fateful friend called me to express his emotional rollercoaster after receiving a positive test result for COVID. He confessed that he was scared, as he has underlying health conditions. And he told me that after he received the notice, he just sat there thinking. Thinking about how bad this might be. What would his family do? He said as all these thoughts were racing through his mind, that the image of Jesus on the cross, surfaced.

He said it was Jesus, His twisted, tortured body with nails through hands and feet, who laid aside His divine nature and entered our world of flesh and blood, pain and tears, it was Jesus he saw who suffered for him. It was then, that he realized that his suffering and his circumstances paled to what he had gained in Christ. The last thing he said before we prayed together, is that he heard Jesus. His Voice saying, It will all be OK, even if you don't think it's OK, it is OK. You are mine and I have you.

Sheep who listen are fearless, but sadly many listen to the false shepherds of the world. Here in our Old Testament reading, the False Shepherds care not for the basic needs of the flock. The weak are not strengthened, the sick are not healed, those who stray are not brought back, and the sheep are scattered. Sheep that are not cared for, that are pushed around, that are taken advantage of live in fear – And their fear is often acted out in their attitude toward others. These are the fearful sheep. They no longer hear the voice of The Good Shepherd.

This morning, the question we all must ask ourselves is, “Who’s voice am I listening to?”

Are you listening to The Good Shepherd, are you in relationship with Him, and united with His faithful followers?

If your answer is yes, I’m listening to my Savior’s voice, then be bold and fearless in knowing that you are under The Good Shepherd’s loving care and protection.

If your answer is along the lines of, I’m not sure, I am afraid, I’m drifting in my relationship with Jesus, or I feel lost, then know that you have a home here under The Good Shepherd. Together we will seek His Ka-los.

Let us pray,