

JJ¹

A few years back there was a series on the Discovery Channel called *Frozen Planet*. In one of the episodes the filmmakers followed a pack of wolves in Russia. In vivid detail from ground cameras and a camera in a helicopter, we watched as a pack of wolves surrounded a herd of animals. They attacked and splintered the group to make it easier to corner and kill their next feast. Had someone been there to ward off the wolves, no animals would have been lost. They would be safe if they had a protector.

Today, we see Jesus use this same imagery to show us both the danger we are in from the Wolf, Satan, and how he, our **SACRIFICING SHEPHERD**, rescues us.

“I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired man, who is not a shepherd, does not own the sheep. He sees the wolf coming, leaves the sheep, and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the sheep and scatters them. Because he works for money, he does not care about the sheep.”

Like sheep without a shepherd are defenseless against a wolf, so too are we. The Wolf, Satan, is a terribly powerful adversary. More powerful than you or I can imagine. There is nothing worse that

any army can do than to underestimate the power and dedication of the opposing army they are about to fight. Friends, all too often we treat Satan as though he's a nice house dog we can pet and only once in a while gets out of line and nips at us. Nothing could be further from the truth! He is a ravenous wolf, always on the prowl, never giving up, always on the attack or watching for the opportunity to attack.

If you try to overcome his temptations on your own, you will fail. If you think that you are strong enough to survive without Jesus' Word in regular worship and devotion in your life, then you're fooling yourself. If you think your children will be safe as they play among the wolves all week long and then bring them into the Shepherd's stable once a week for an hour or two, you're fooling yourself. Going to church once a week for an hour or two isn't like charging the battery on your phone. Your soul needs daily feeding!

Each one of you knows, at least in part, how dangerous the Wolf is because each one of you can recognize the wounds on your own souls and in your lives. The thing is, you have to realize that every time the Wolf has injured you or caught you, it wasn't because your Shepherd failed. It was because you ran away from the protecting arms of your Shepherd,

¹ JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for “Jesus Help”. It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

Jesus, and straight into the bloody jaws of the Wolf! Your sin is all your own fault, and no one else's. The pain and consequences you endure because of your sin is all your own fault. You cannot blame your Shepherd who is always there for you. You have run away from him. You cannot even blame the Wolf who pounced on you with his temptation because you were the one who gave yourself to him!

Yet, every perfect battle your Shepherd fought against the Wolf and all the wounds and even death he suffered at the jaws of the Wolf and the rest of his condemned pack, he endured for you. And because of this, he is both willing and able to heal every one of your wounds too!

The wounds of his feet heals all your wounds as you walked away from him to walk in the ways of this world. The wounds of his hands heals all your wounds as you used your hands to serve your own sinful, selfish desires. The wounds of his head heals all your wounds as you thought evil thoughts about others, or pondered perverse things, or thought your own fallen human thinking and reasoning was better and smarter than the truth of your holy God revealed in his holy Word. The wound of his side heals all the wounds

you inflicted on yourself as you put your arm around your sin as though it was your friend. All this is possible because of the infinite wound inflicted on your **SACRIFICING SHEPHERD'S** soul, suffering your hell, your eternal torment. And he did this freely and willingly. To the world's eyes, he looks unwilling, but especially throughout Maundy Thursday night and Good Friday, Jesus made clear what he says here:



“I lay down my life for the sheep...This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life so that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have the authority to lay it down, and I have the authority to take it up again. This is the commission I received from my Father.”

And friends, because of this, Jesus can say, “I am the Good Shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me...” By God's grace through faith, you know your Shepherd and you know his voice. You know his voice because he speaks to you through his holy Word. You know his voice in his exposing law, as he condemns you for your sin. You know his voice in his beautiful gospel, as he restores your soul through his full and free forgiveness. And it is through that restoring love that your Shepherd makes

you stronger and all the more able to recognize the Wolf as he come prowling your way so that you would run to your Shepherd for rescue.

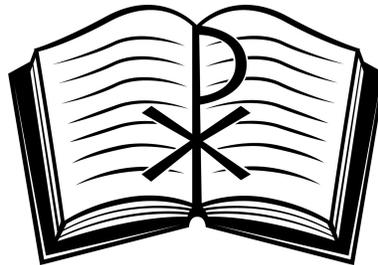
And part of being stronger, wiser sheep filled with his love is to be his instruments in fulfilling his words: "I also have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. Then there will be one flock and one shepherd."

Friends, you and I are all our Good Shepherd's little lambs, called to be his instruments in bringing other sheep to know their Good Shepherd, Jesus. You had an excellent opportunity to do this during Holy Week with the personal invitations that were given to you on Palm Sunday. I hope that you took those two cards or more which you received and that they found their way into the hands of people who might not have otherwise been in church on Easter. If you did this, to God alone be the praise and glory, and may God bless those invitations with a return visit or a visit yet to come.

If those cards are still in your purse or on your dresser, or were simply put in the trash...why? Was it fear, or simple unwillingness to be your Shepherd's witnesses? If the Wolf attacked you in this way, know that your shame and guilt is washed away in the blood of your

SACRIFICING SHEPHERD. In the peace of Jesus' full forgiveness, and knowing and believing in his eternal love for you, now go and make a plan to invite two people to join you for worship. I know it won't work to give them the invitation to Easter anymore. But you can still do it by simply saying something like, "I'd love it if you came with me to church, so you can see and hear why this is so important to me."

For those of you who did give your invitations to those who otherwise may not have considered worshiping on Easter, follow up on that invitation. If they came to worship, then encourage them to come again. Ask them if they have any questions. If they didn't come, continue to invite them to come and see.



Friends, encourage and invite those in your life who don't yet know who their Good Shepherd is. There are so many out there that your Good Shepherd intends to make sheep in his sheep pen and both you and I together as pastor and people are those through whom Jesus has chosen to do that work.

Your Good Shepherd is your **SACRIFICING SHEPHERD** and he sacrificed it all for you so you wouldn't have to suffer at all. He has rescued you from the jaws of the Wolf, Satan, and set you free to live in his forgiveness and love. Dear fellow sheep, listen to the voice of your

Shepherd who laid down his life for you
and took it up again for you, all so he can
take you up to his heavenly sheep pen.
Amen.

SDG²

² SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for “To God Alone Be The Glory”. This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn’t about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.

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