

Sermon for Good Shepherd Sunday April 21 2024

There's a pattern in the Gospel of John, one that we see several times.

It's a three-part pattern. Jesus performs a sign, then there's some dialogue about the meaning of the sign, then Jesus himself explains the meaning of the sign. Jesus does something, people react and wonder, and Jesus explains it all to them. It is a sign of Jesus' divinity – his power and all that it means – but it is also a sign of the great love Jesus has for all who believe. It's not a magic trick where after the "Alakazaam!" folks ooh and aah and are surprised and maybe a little frightened of it and wonder how the magic trick is done. It's a sign, and this is something only a divine being can do, and it's for the good of those who are changed by the sign and for those who see it happening.

But we don't hear the beginning of this three-part pattern. The blind man's healing has already occurred, all the way back at the beginning of chapter nine. The dialogue has also occurred: it started in verse 8 of chapter nine, and goes all the way through to verse 39, and then Jesus starts explaining it all to the one who was healed and anyone else who is around and wondering what this means. And we don't even get to hear the first part of Jesus' discourse on the miracle, which runs through the beginning of Chapter 10. We simply hear the final part of his explanation: I am the Good Shepherd. I take care of my sheep. I'm doing what my Heavenly Father has told me to do.

And it's a shame that we don't hear today what has preceded these seven verses, nor do we hear what follows: some others are still mystified and doubtful about it all, and start another disagreement with Jesus about it, and he calmly explains it to them, using that same metaphor of the shepherd of the sheep caring

for them. He knows that this will be one more thing that confirms to them that he is dangerous, and it will be mentioned when he is charged, and he will die.

And yet, his focus is not on what will happen to him, but how important it is that his people, the ones who listen, understand how much he loves and cares for them.

These brief seven verses are so beautiful and simple. The metaphor is a familiar one to the people who are listening. The shepherd, that fellow who is out in all kinds of weather keeping watch over his sheep, that guy who is smelly because sheep are smelly, that one whose wife says “go wash up before you come into the house,” the shepherd is not the highest ranking person they know, but he’s the one who does the hardest work.

In our Zoom Bible study this past Thursday, we talked about the calling of David, the youngest son of Jesse, the least likely of kings, and we mused about how David convinced King Saul to let him go out and battle the most frightening Goliath, who stood somewhere between six foot 9 and 10 feet, depending on which translation you use, and who was properly labeled the Philistines’ champion. The one who always won these mano a mano battles. David, who is still so small that when Saul gives him his armor to wear, it’s too heavy and he cannot move in it. But he convinces Saul to let him do it because he’s a brave shepherd who protected his family’s sheep, even killing a marauding lion and a hungry bear. Why does Saul say yes to this? On its face it is ridiculous, this young lad who cannot wear the protective gear that will save his life. And yet Saul says yes, and we can imagine that David’s passion to do this thing is impressive to Saul, even though it seems as if the boy will be killed. And then, we know how the story

ends: David pulls out his slingshot and his stones, and nails Goliath, who falls down, out cold. Then David takes Goliath's sword and makes a killing blow, and chops off the giant's head.

David's story of being such a passionate shepherd that he wants to defend all of Israel and Judah is a precursor of what we hear in the New Testament: a shepherd who guards his sheep and will even sacrifice himself for their good. In the New Testament story, the Good Shepherd does not triumph and live, at least not in the way that David does. He dies, but his triumph, and his promise of guarding, caring, protecting does not die. This shepherd is an eternal one who continues to show his love for his flock to this day. David does it once. The Good Shepherd is forever the Good Shepherd.

It is wise to remember this, in this season of change. We may feel shaken by the events in the world. We may worry what the future holds for this faith family. But know this: the Good Shepherd continues to abide with us and protect us, as long as we listen for his voice. Do not think that you have to do everything – Jesus is already doing some things to care for and guide us. Trust in the Good Shepherd. He's already shown us a thousand times over that he is watching out for us. Know that this is as it will be forever, and say "Alleluia, Amen!"