

St. John 10:11-18

Dear Friends in Christ,

The opening words of our sermon hymn were these: "Lord, take my hand and lead me Upon life's way; Direct, protect, and feed me From day to day." How about this: "Please take care of me!?" Sounds good, doesn't it?

When you're young you can't get away quick enough from parents and others who seem to be dragging you through one issue after another in an effort to prepare you for the concerns and conflicts you must and will face from this world? It starts with Mommy's and Daddy's first "No!" and doesn't end until the last breath. Not an easy journey, is it?

And so, we sing and cry out, "Lord, take my hand and lead me...". Please get me through so much - much!- **mess!** And a fair amount of it my own making! This morning we consider . . .

LORD, TAKE OUR HANDS AND SHEPHERD US THROUGH.

I. Because We Are Sheep.

Our text begins with Jesus saying, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." (v. 11) And it's right there, right off the starting line: *The good shepherd lays down his life.* And why? Because of our sin. And you know the definition: "sin is lawlessness." A sin is a criminal act against God! It messes up everything. We're always battling to correct messes we've made. Thought process about people and issues that can drive us into a rage. Mouths that praise God one moment, and spew forth anger, hatred and gossip the next. I'm guessing that everyone here is living with consequences of bad thinking. And a lot of it made with the awareness that, at the outset, it was not what God wanted. We knew it!! Lawlessness. Consequences. And the paycheck every human receives for investing in sin? Death!

In the 51st Psalm David writes, "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight." (vv. 3-4) We must hear that: "Against you, you only, have I sinned...". Every sin, regardless of what it is or who it might involve - every sin is first and foremost against God. Vance Havner once used this very old illustration from over 30 years ago:

A family was picnicking near a watermelon patch. When one of the boys stole a melon, his mother said, "Don't you dare get another one - you don't know what they've been sprayed with!" Breaking God's laws is lightly regarded nowadays; (today, mostly ignored!) only the secondary considerations get attention. (The Vance Havner Notebook, compiled by Dennis J. Hester, Baker Book House, 1989, p. 275)

There are those times when we are sorrowful or regretful because of the harm our sin has done to others or ourselves. But, again, the real issue tied to all sin is our relationship to God. It condemns us to hell. We confess with David, "(God is) justified in (His) words and blameless in His judgment."

I am always drawn to the Parable of The Pharisee and the Tax collector. You know the parable. "The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.'" (Lk. 18:11) In contrast, we're told, "But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'" (Lk. 18:13)

Friends, that tax collector is us! Sheep! Helpless! It's the best we can do: beat our breasts. It's the best we can offer: "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" We can do nothing more than apply the Word of God to ourselves: "We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away." (Is. 64:6) We are helpless...sheep!! It is Jesus Who gathers His sheep.

II. Because The Shepherd Loves Us.

Again, from our text:

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep...I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep.” (vv.11,14)

The wonder and comfort of this is impressed upon us in these words from Isaiah:

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. (Is. 53:4-5)

I battle with guilt. Do you? I suffer with regrets. Do you? I hate what passes through my mind, what flies out of my mouth, my misguided actions. And every now and then that passing thought: “Can God keep on loving and forgiving me?” The Word of God never changes: “The blood of Jesus (God’s Son) cleanses us from all sin.” (1 Jn. 1:7b) That’s past - present - future. And this: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” (Rom. 8:1) None. It’s all removed forever.

And He knows us. Paul says, “he chose us in him before the foundation (the creation) of the world...(adopted) us (to be his) through Jesus Christ.” (Eph. 1:4,5) It’s true, as David wrote, “in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for us, when as yet there was none of them.” (Ps. 139:16)

All these wonderful truths of God’s love for us in Christ and where that love takes us must become a daily and comforting part of our lives. And here’s why . . .

III. Because the Wolves Are Always After Us.

He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. (vv. 12-13)

So, who is the wolf? Of course, in the first sense, the wolf is Satan and his murderous forces of hell. Secondly, Jesus warns, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing and inwardly are ravenous wolves.” (Matt. 7:15) And with that Paul warns the leaders of the church at Ephesus, “I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.” (Acts 20:29-30) Wolves; a person or faction bent on twisting the Word of God for personal benefit - and that at the expense of the sheep. The church in America is being torn to pieces by such. They leave clear marks: compromise of the Word; the shelving of Scriptures that speak of sin, death and hell, and the goal of eternal life. And then comes the promises of peace and comfort **with** this world!

Equally evil is the hireling. Jesus describes such as the one “who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees...He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.” Or, specifically, it’s the pastor who is “pastoring” simply for his own advantage and will never confront error for fear of the consequences. Of the hireling, Martin Luther wrote, “Either he will flee shamefully and desert the sheep, or he will keep silence and let the sheep go without pasture, that is, without the Word.”

And so we cry out, ***Lord Take Our Hands and Shepherd Us Through***. Dear friends, He does. Remember? "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want...Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me...". (Ps. 23:4) He is always there for us in Word and Sacrament. Always there in the midst of our troubles and tears. Always there comforting with us His mercy and forgiveness.

And get this: even though the One Who shepherds us through, our Lord Jesus, does not take away the sufferings and struggles of life here- well, you know, "I walk through the valley of the shadow of death" - though He does not take away difficulties of this fallen world, He places these promises before us:

When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous (they don't go away in this life), but the Lord delivers him out of them all (right into eternal, joy and comfort). (Ps. 34:17-19)

He's not shepherding so we can remain here. He's shepherding us through to everlasting life.
Lord, Take Our Hands And Shepherd Us Through!

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

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Shepherd Us Through”***

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- II. Because The Shepherd Loves Us.*
- III. Because the Wolves Are Always After Us.*

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