

Easter 4C (4/25/10 – *The Risen Shepherd Shepherds Us in Love*)

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

I suppose Jesus might have been OK with the Jews if He had just stopped short of the last verse in our Gospel for this *Fourth Sunday of Easter*. If He had just spoken about being a Shepherd and the sheep hearing His voice and knowing Him since He knows them ... if He had simply stuck with His sheep following Him, the Jews probably would not have picked up stones to stone Him – as the verse immediately following our Gospel text tell us they did [JOHN 10.31]. If Jesus had restricted Himself to this shepherding language, and the Father's greatness and power to keep the sheep safe in His hand, things might have been OK.

Sure, there was the implication that He and the Father were One. *I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand*, He says [10.28]. And then in the very next verse He continues: *and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand* [10.29]. Yes, giving the sheep eternal life ... preventing them from ever perishing – that is the work of God. And even the shepherding language was a bit risky. *The LORD is my Shepherd, I shall not want* [PSA 23.1]. The Jews certainly knew that – and the other shepherding/sheep passages God has spoken in the Old Testament. So even the shepherding language implied that Jesus was divine. Still ... if He had just limited Himself to that, Jesus could have been OK. But He didn't. He added: *I and the Father are One* [10.30]. *You want to know if I am the Christ? Well, I've already told you in words ... shown you in miraculous deeds.* We heard how John wrote at the end of his Gospel on the *Second Sunday of Easter: Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His Name.* [20.30-31] *But if you really want to know how it is ... Who I am, Jesus says, well here it is ... and this will really set you off: I and the Father are One.*

But then, the Jews were already lost long before Jesus said that – because

the Jews were **not** a part of Jesus' flock. They refused to hear His voice. They didn't really know Him. They certainly didn't follow Him. And before we get too judgmental ... and think too highly of ourselves, we should remember that we are just like those Jews in so many ways. Just like them, we refuse to hear Jesus' voice at times – especially when He says *No* and we want to hear *Yes* ... or *Yes, you ought to do that* when we don't really want to. Christ says: *Stay!* – but our sinful flesh *goes its own way*. He says: *Don't do it!* – but our flesh says: *Go right ahead ... do what you want ... it's your life!* Our Lord and Shepherd would make us to lie down in green pastures – but we want to run in the dust and roll in the mud. Our Lord and Shepherd would lead us beside the still waters of His fountain of grace – but we want the power and excitement of the raging river of sinful pleasures. Our Lord and Shepherd would lead us in paths of righteousness for His Name's sake – but we walk in the alleyways of unrighteousness ... and make a name for ourselves (even if it is one of notoriety and ill repute).

We walk through the valley of the shadow of death – and think we have found true life. We fear men and lack of freedom to choose for ourselves rather than fearing the just wrath of God against our sin to which we are in bondage. We find God's rod way too harsh ... and His staff far too confining. They should comfort us – when the rod of the Law pushes us away from that which would harm us and the staff of His Gospel pulls us back in from danger to the safety of the fold. But we despise the one and disdain the other. God would prepare for us a table of true delights – but we dine with the enemy. We want to anoint ourselves as kings and lords – and fill our cups to the brim with our own plans and desires. Forget goodness and mercy – we want what we think is rightfully ours ... what we think we deserve. Oh ... and we want to build our own mansions to dwell in.

That's the way of our sinful flesh. We see it in the Jews. We must see it also in ourselves ... and repent.

They say a picture is worth a thousand words. That certainly goes for the picture – or icon – on the front of our bulletin. The Greek letters in the

upper corners are abbreviations for *Jesus Christ* – as if we didn't already know Who this is in the icon. The letters in the halo around Jesus head – or nimbus, as it is called – say in Greek, *The Being One*. Which is to say, that Jesus is the One *Who is and Who was and Who is to come* (as we heard in REVELATION a couple of Sundays ago [REV 1.8]) ... the One Who always IS – *I AM WHO I AM* ... *YHWH* – as He revealed Himself to Moses and the people of Israel [EXO 3.14]. Or as Jesus puts it in the words used as the *Antiphon* for today's *Introit* – from a few verses earlier in JOHN'S Gospel – *I AM the Good Shepherd. I know My own and My own know Me, and I lay down My life for the sheep* [JN 10.14-15b]. Jesus Christ is YHWH ... the eternal God. And He is, therefore, also *the Good Shepherd*. Those are the words over our Lord's right and left shoulders in the icon. But notice how this picture portrays to us Jesus Christ our Good Shepherd – with His Cross behind Him ... and the nail-prints in His hands ... yet living ... carrying His beloved sheep upon His shoulders ... His shepherd's staff in the crook of His arm ... and dressed in both crimson and royal blue.

Jesus Christ, the almighty Lord and God and King, is our *Good Shepherd* – Who has laid down His life for the sake of us, His beloved sheep, by shedding His holy, innocent blood on the Cross. Christ our *Good Shepherd* has made Himself the Paschal Lamb to ransom His sheep from slavery to sin, death, and devil. Christ the sinless One reconciles sinners – all sinners ... including you and me – to the Father. In order that we might never perish, Jesus our *Good Shepherd* let His life perish on the Cross at the hands of sinful men. And even from the Cross, our *Good Shepherd* spoke plainly and in both His life and death there showed forth that He was the Christ of God. *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do* [LK 23.34]. *Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise* [LK 23.43]. *Woman, behold, your son!* [JN 19.26]. *It is finished* [JN 19.30]. *Father, into Your hands I commend My Spirit* [LK 23.46]. Jesus' words and actions were so plain, that even the centurion on duty knew what they meant when he saw how Jesus breathed His last, and said: *Truly this Man was the Son of God!* [MK 15.39].

But the **Good Shepherd** has taken His life back up again that He might give us eternal life. That is especially what we celebrate throughout this *Eastertide* – *The Prince of Life, Who died, reigns immortal*. That is the scene set before us in our *Epistle* ... from REVELATION. The great innumerable multitude of believers is *standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God Who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”* [REV 7.9-10] When the question arises: *Who are those, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?* [7.13] The answer is given: *These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb.* [7.14] For now we live in great tribulation. The world, the devil, and even our own sinful flesh fight against us – and would try to snatch us from our **Good Shepherd’s** hand ... get us away from the Father ... rob us of life both here and in eternity.

But **The Risen Shepherd Shepherds Us in Love**. He will not allow anyone or anything to snatch us out of His loving hand. For, He has engraved you into His very palms – and feet and side. And where your **Good Shepherd** is, there you shall be – safe and secure. Today the Risen Shepherd Shepherds you in love. He speaks in clear tones, saying: *Your sins are forgiven. You are Mine ... and I am your Good Shepherd. Yea, though you walk in the valley of the shadow of death, you need not fear that evil, for I am with you to comfort you with My rod and staff ... and to prepare a table of forgiveness and life before you despite all the enemies that surround you out there. I have anointed your head in the waters of Holy Baptism and called you by name. And here in My Holy Supper I make the cup of blessing, which is My atoning Blood, overflow for you and all believers. Hear My voice when I speak to warn you in the words of the Law. Hear My voice when I soothe your wounds with the healing balm of My Gospel. Follow Me ... and I will give you eternal life and you will never perish ... never leave My love-marked hands.*

In the Name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]