

## Sermon Advent 2 12/5/18 God with us – Our Shepherd Isaiah 40:11

Dear Followers of the Shepherd:

I have some good news and some bad news tonight.

- The bad news is that the Shepherd is watching
- The good news is that the Shepherd is watching

Does the Shepherd know how important it is for us to do our sheeplike thing---

- To wander after the succulent greens just over the next hill
- To walk to the place we pretend that we have set
- To ignore the call and head in the direction of the next beckoning light
- To move toward the front of the herd and pretend that we are leading
- To follow the voice that we created in our own imagination

How hard it is to be a sheep.

- Our creativity is stunted
- Our independent thinking is crushed into conformity
- Our abilities are unappreciated

Would it not be great to be free...

- To make our own decisions
- To go our own way
- To find our own spotlights
- To attend to our own needs
- To feast in the pastures of our own choosing
- To climb the hills of our own desires

The bad news is that the Shepherd is watching

Until we fall...

- Until we wander into box canyons
- Until we fall into unmarked pits
- Until we find the limits of our abilities

- Until we discover the consequences of our own choices
- Until we suffer the painful dead ends of our self-serving decisions

We may not be mindful fully that the Shepherd is watching.

Psalm 95:7f reminds us that **“He is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.”** Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts...”

We are his sheep because he created us to be his own.

- But we are known to wander off
- We wander into dangerous situations
- We wander from God’s will
- We fall into temptation

Oh, how good it is to know that we are under the gaze of the Shepherd who...

- Never sleeps
- Never turns away
- Never gives up on us
- Never leaves us alone
- Never abandons us
- Never stops watching and waiting and calling

How good it is to know that the Shepherd promises that we will not want---even when we have followed out own wants and been found wanting.

The Good News is that the Shepherd is watching.

Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd but we likely don’t run into many shepherds in our world. In fact, the true shepherds in our country are almost a vanishing breed. But shepherds were important in Jesus’ world.

Sheep were raised for their wool, used in clothing; the skins were shaped into containers for wine; sheep were used for meat and milk and more.

Here are some remarkable facts about the shepherd of biblical times, truths that tell us about what Jesus was saying about himself when he called himself the Good Shepherd.

A shepherd was an important position in the community. Rather than each family leading and guarding their sheep, the sheep of the village were put together so that one shepherd could care for them.

- A shepherd had a 24/7 job
- The shepherd was expected to make sure the sheep had enough food by leading the sheep to green pastures by the still waters
- The shepherd had the responsibility to make sure the sheep were safe in the sheepfold at night.

When the shepherd led...

- The sheep did not meet to vote on whether they should follow the shepherd
- The sheep trusted the shepherd and followed. Period.

As Jesus' sheep we don't gather and vote on whether to follow. The shepherd knows where to lead ---and we know to follow him.

Psalm 23:3 says the Shepherd guides us in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

To walk in the paths of righteousness is to walk in obedience to God's Word to bring glory to him.

- Through trials and even in death, Jesus our Shepherd protects us from the evil one and shelters us with the comfort of his Word
- Goodness and mercy follow us and we will dwell in God's presence forever.

The shepherd was expected to "lay down his life" for the sheep. He protected them, whatever the threat.

- The sheep did not question his ability to care for them
- They trusted, followed and depended on the shepherd to do whatever was necessary to keep them safe.

As Jesus' sheep, we depend on our Good Shepherd to take care of us.

The Lord is my Shepherd we say.

- There is no other
- Our Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep

- He says in his word that “For those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” Rom 8:28

The Savior loves his sheep and we trust him.

Like the clay that turns against the potter who formed it; sheep may turn away from the shepherd and wander off into danger. God will lay our sins on the Lamb, who will be slain in our place. The Lamb will not try to save himself. He will save us.

False shepherds, false teachers and priests, led the people astray in Jesus day and false teachers lead people astray today, too.

The shepherd knew his sheep and they knew him. Sometimes flocks of sheep from several shepherds would get mixed together as they sought new pastures.

- But the sheep knew their shepherd.
- He could stand aside and call.
- His sheep knew their shepherd’s voice and would come to him

### **We know our Shepherd’s voice**

- He comes to us in his Word and in the Word as it is shared by our fellow believers
- Jesus said: “My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me.” John 10:27

Jesus calls us to follow. Do we hear?

In Bible times, shepherds knew that their sheep were not very bright. They often strayed, following the illusion that the grass is greener in the next pasture.

Our Good Shepherd knows when we stray after things we think will make us happy and fulfill us.

- Often we are disappointed and find ourselves wandering somewhere away from our Shepherd.
- Our Shepherd does not wait for us to find our way back.
- Our Shepherd leaves the other sheep, the 99 and comes looking for us
- He will not give up on us
- He searches until he finds us and then he gently brings us back.

It is all too easy to get spiritually lost in our world.

- Temptations surround us.
- We cannot overcome them on our own
- Our Good Shepherd seeks us out, calls us back, surrounds us with his loving care and holds us as his own now and eternally.

Jesus is the door

- He is the only way of salvation
- He is the only way into the sheepfold

When we call Jesus our Good Shepherd we are naming him the One we know, the one we listen to, the one we follow, the one we trust, the one who brings us safety and peace. We have no other.

Hebrews 13:20-21 May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip us with everything good for doing his will and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever.

Sometimes Advent and its preparation can be a time of hollow joy...

- A fleeting joy based only on momentary fun or a good feeling
- The coming of the Christ Child offers us a chance to again find the contented joy of found and cared for sheep
- We know that we have heard the announcement of the Good News of great joy to all people

God is with us again, the Child of Bethlehem

- The Child who will become by his death and resurrection our loving Shepherd
- The Child who keeps us as his own to eternal life in him

The Lamb, born in the Bethlehem stable and worshiped by shepherds is also the Good Shepherd, a Shepherd-King like his ancestor David.

- The Lamb is also our Shepherd

- The Shepherd's ancestor King David said: "I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

We dwell in his house for all eternity with white robes washed in the blood of the Lamb.  
Revelation 7:9ff

Our Shepherd will shelter us in his presence and lead us to living water where every tear will be wiped from our eyes.

He will tend his flock like a shepherd.