

“The Sheep Hear His Voice”

Text: “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.” St. John 10:11.

Today is the Second Sunday after Easter. It is called “Good Shepherd Sunday” because of our Gospel lesson on this Sunday, with our Lord’s assertion: “I am the good shepherd....” Today I want us to look at four points in regard to this assertion: “I am the good shepherd”.

1. First of all, this assertion is the fulfilment of the Old Testament. You remember when Moses was tending sheep for his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian, he was confronted by the Burning Bush. And Moses was commanded to lead the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt. And Moses asked, “Whom shall I say sent me?” And the Almighty answered, “Tell them I AM sent you.” (The Name of God, I AM, is written in the King James Version in capitals.) Now Jesus claims this Name for Himself and then, in the Gospel of St. John, amplifies it seven times. “I am the Bread of Life.” “I am the Light of the world.” “I am the Door of the Sheep.” (Always I AM.) Then, again, in our passage today, “I am the Good Shepherd.” At the time when he was going to raise Lazarus from the dead, He proclaimed “I am the Resurrection and the Life.” And on the night in which He was betrayed, as he left the Upper Room and walked toward Gethsemane – as Archbishop Temple reconstructs it – He passed the Temple, with the figure of the golden vine on the side; and our Lord proclaimed: “I am the True Vine.” And, in answer to the question of Thomas, “Lord, we know not whither Thou goest. And how can we know the way? our Lord answered, with the seventh amplification, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.”

Our Lord is the fulfilment of the Old Testament. He is the completion of the Old Testament revelation of God. “He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.” He is also the fulfilment of God’s creation of man. Throughout the Old Testament, there is the figure of the shepherd. Abraham was a nomad, herding his flocks from place to place to find pasture. Moses was tending the sheep of his father-in-law, when he was confronted by the Burning Bush. David, the great king, was a shepherd when he was anointed. And when the angels announced the Birth of the Messiah, the announcement came to the shepherds, tending their flocks by night, just outside the home town of King David, Bethlehem. Thus, in making the assertion, “I am the Good Shepherd, our Lord is fulfilling the prophecy of the Old Testament and also completing the development of the role of the shepherd.

2. The second point for us to consider is that He is the good shepherd, and not a hired hand. And that is an important distinction to make. Archbishop Temple says the difference is that the shepherd cares more for the welfare of the sheep than for his own. Let us consider that it is very easy to become a hired hand. The ministry is a protected profession. The very word minister means “servant”; but how frequently it is that the minister is the one who is himself served! The difference is important. Recently in an interview with *The Mobile Register*, Lord Carey, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, said “The Bible is one clear, univocal voice” that homosexuality is wrong. That would seem clear enough, wouldn’t it? But then, in the very next paragraph, he goes on to say, “We simply have to wait and see how the Holy Spirit is going to lead the Church...” Wait and see? Wait for what? Could it possibly be that the Archbishop is really waiting for his next paycheck? It seems to me that his whole career as archbishop has been one of waiting, waiting to see which way the tide would run, and then accommodating himself to the changes taking place. The changes in the prayer book and the ordination of women, he has managed to go along with. And presumably the “consecration” of women as bishops. Nor have I heard any protest about her Majesty’s request for legislation for same-sex relationships or the granting of that request by Parliament. The one issue that Lord Carey expresses concern about is homosexuality, and about that issue, he wants to wait and see. Could it possibly be that he is waiting to surrender as painlessly as possible? All clergy face the peril of becoming hired hands, and we all need your prayers.

3. The Lord Jesus Christ is the great Shepherd of the sheep. The true Shepherd. And the one Shepherd. He is the good Shepherd who giveth His life for the sheep, “who made there (by his one oblation of himself once offered) a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world...” He is the Shepherd, and no one and no thing can ever take His place. As Bishop Pickering has reminded us, the very first argument the disciples got into was – what? You know. They got into an argument about who was going to be the greatest in Christ’s kingdom! And in the course of church history, this argument has come up again and again. It

was precisely this dispute about who was the greatest that led to the Great Schism of the Church in 1054. The Metropolitan of Constantinople and the Bishop of Rome, called “the Pope”, got into this argument; and the Church was split between the Orthodox Church of the East and the Western Church. And the schism has never been healed. And this argument did not end there. During the Middle Ages there were, for quite a while, two popes, one in Avignon and the other in Rome. Both had been elected by the same College of Cardinals, and each claimed to be the greatest. And before that controversy was settled, there were in 1415 three popes, each with his own court and claims: John 23rd, Gregory 12th, and Benedict 13th. Who is the greatest? Bishop Pickering (who comes from a Baptist background and, therefore, reads the Bible) reminds us that there is no mention in the New Testament of archbishop. There are bishops, who tend to be senior clergy in cities who reach out to missions in smaller towns. But there is no hierarchy developed. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the One, Great Shepherd of the sheep; and anything that attempts to take his place is an idol.

4. “I am the Good Shepherd.” He is the fulfilment of the Old Testament. He is the Shepherd, not a hired hand. He is the One Shepherd. And He is our Shepherd. Earlier in the service we were singing, “Saviour, like a shepherd lead us.” Well, do you know how He leads? The shepherd in the Bible does not walk behind and herd the sheep. The shepherd walks in front. As our Lord Himself describes it, “...and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.” He calleth His own by name. That was what happened on Easter morning, wasn’t it? Mary Magdalen had gone to the tomb early, and when she saw Jesus, she supposed He was the gardener. But then He said one word, “Mary”, and she responded “Rabboni”. He calleth His sheep by name. He called Thomas by name. In the Sacrament of Baptism, you have been given your own name, in addition to your family name, so that you can be called by name. He calleth His own by name. But that means we have to be listening. He doesn’t lead us by pushing us in a baby carriage! He calls us by name and goes before us; and we are supposed to follow. But that means we have to be listening. You remember the words of Andrew to his brother Simon Peter. Andrew said to his brother, “We have found the Messiah!” But what is the implication? He “found” Him because he was already looking. C.S. Lewis tells us that every day we need to hold before our eyes some central truth of the Christian faith. A prayer. The Apostles’ Creed. Every day we need to be listening to our Shepherd.

Because He is the Good Shepherd, who giveth His life for the sheep.

Preached at All Saints Church, Pensacola, Florida, on Sunday, May 10, 2005, by The Rev. Hugh Hall, Jr.