

## ***Following Our Shepherd – John 10:22-30***

The Holy Gospel appointed for the Fourth Sunday of Easter comes from the Gospel of St. John, the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter, and can be found on page 896 in your Bible. This reading will be the text for meditation for this morning. This Sunday is always Good Shepherd Sunday, and in this concluding section, Jesus reminds us that His sheep always listen to His voice and follow Him – and thus are safe in His hand forever. Hear this gospel: <sup>22</sup> **At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter,** <sup>23</sup> **and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon.** <sup>24</sup> **So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.”** <sup>25</sup> **Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me,** <sup>26</sup> **but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep.** <sup>27</sup> **My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.** <sup>28</sup> **I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.** <sup>29</sup> **My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.** <sup>30</sup> **I and the Father are one.”** Here ends the reading.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

It is a challenge when you are driving in a city that you do not know. In my case I have been in Ottawa, St. Catharines, Waterloo, Kitchener, London, and Strathroy. For the most part while I drive I can find my way around the city quickly and efficiently. But this is totally different when you drive in a city you do not know. To drive in a city that you know is easy, but to drive in a city you do not know is confusing. Sometime you can get help from someone who live in the city, but have you ever followed someone who was supposed to know where they were going, only to find out 10 or 15 minutes into the drive that they were as lost or as confused as you were?

In the process, you probably are more lost than if you had done this all by yourself. In following, we do not often pay as much attention to the landmarks around us, for we are concentrating on the car in front of us. We really do not know where we are—and we do not have any idea of how to get back to where we started. And so we look for someone who can direct us better; someone who will know where they are going: a policeman, a local resident, or someone with a map.

In our text today we have the assurance that the Good Shepherd is with His people, to lead them to the joy of eternal life. As we continue to proclaim the full message of the new life in Christ, as the angel bid the disciples to do, we look today at resurrection living as following the shepherd—the Shepherd who is the way to life with God in all its fullness.

I think most of you, if not all, are familiar with the story of the **Pied Piper of Hamelin**, also known as the **Pan Piper**, the **Rat-Catcher of Hamelin**. It is a legend from the town of Hamelin (Hameln), Lower Saxony, Germany, in the Middle Ages. This legend describe a piper, dressed in multicolored ("pied") clothing, who was a rat-catcher hired by the town to lure rats away with his magic pipe. When the citizens refuse to pay for this service, he retaliates by using his instrument's magic power on their children, leading them away as he had the rats. Nothing anyone could do could keep the children from following the piper, and he led the children away as punishment on the people for their dishonesty.

Friends, just because someone wants you to follow them does not mean that you should. But there are many voices, many pipers in our world today, and they all call us to follow them. Islam, for example, is "a false religion and Muhammad is a false prophet. As a follower of Jesus who affirms the Bible as God's Word, I do not believe Muhammad received revelation from God, but from the devil, since the information (he said he received) contradicts fundamental truths of the Bible.

Muhammad's revelations are misleading, and since the Quran denies that Jesus is the Son of God and denies that He died for our sins and rose from the dead, Islam is a false religion and Muhammad is a false prophet. Almost 1.5 billion people have been deceived by Islam and that makes Islam the world's largest false religion."

But there are countless false shepherds in our world today, all doing the same thing; all calling us to follow them. "There are people in the world today who call themselves believers and are leaders in various ways. Some call themselves prophets, or evangelists, or pastors, or some other title. No matter what title they call themselves, the idea is that they believe they are doing a work for God. Their teaching may have some of God's Word in it, but often it contains false teachings also. It promotes the idea that certain sexual practices are acceptable to God, even though God spoke against it in the Bible. They will also promote supporting other false beliefs. There are "churches" around now that believe you can believe in anything you want and still get into heaven." There are voices calling us to forget God, because they say God is dead—oh they are so wrong! There are thousands of different philosophies and religious ideals, all of which claim to know the way, but which are leading people straight to eternal death in hell.

The Pharisees, who came and asked Jesus to tell them plainly whether or not he was the Christ did not really want to hear that He was the messiah. Even if He did tell them He was the Messiah, they would have accused Him of blasphemy. They did not want to follow Him. They did not believe in Him! They thought they knew the way, and that people should listen to them and follow their teaching. The reason they were so upset with Jesus was that He was trespassing on their territory. People were listen to Jesus. They were following Jesus and that irritated the Pharisees. At

times you can almost hear them saying, “Don’t listen to Him! Listen to us! We are the ones who will lead you to the life God wants you to have!” Jesus once called the Pharisees blind guides, because they led the people astray. They were not leading them to God and the forgiveness and life only He can give. They were leading them away from God’s love and grace. But Jesus had come to be the Shepherd who would lead His people to God’s grace. He would be the One to bring them to eternal life.

A group of people in the Second World War were trying to make their way through enemy lines to safety. They had to journey through a land covered by mines. The soldiers watching for them would pose another danger. But these people were fortunate to have a leader who was familiar with the area. He knew where the mine fields were - and how to avoid them. He knew where the soldiers would most likely patrol. He was confident that he could lead the people to safety if they would follow him.

There were some who decided to set out on their own. They were either captured or killed. But those who followed this one man made it to safety. They travelled through swampy areas and across dangerous trails. They had to crawl through thorny bushes rather than travelling the paved roads. There were times when they went hungry; times when they were thirsty; times when they were cold and wet - but they arrived safely. And it was all because they followed the right leader.

Friends, we need to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd as He calls us to follow Him, that He may lead us to eternal life. He says: ***My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.*** What a difference this is from the misguided, blind and lost shepherds of this world! The way Jesus leads is not always easy. He leads us by way of the cross—that cross that reminds us of the sin and shame of our lives, and just how much we deserve to perish. But the cross also reminds us of the Sacrifice the Shepherd made for His sheep. He gave Himself in our place, and suffered the pain that we endured, so that He might call us to something better: to the glory of life we have through His resurrection.

For all those who do have the Holy Spirit's gift of faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins, He gives us the right to be called children of God. Jesus promises to care for us better than any shepherd cares for any sheep. He calls to us and knows us. He leads us and protects us. Even when we must travel through death, He comforts us. He has promised that death will only be temporary and that He will lead us to eternal life. He has promised to keep us in His eternal care and no harm can come to us while we are in His care.

We have a wonderful description of heaven in the epistle lesson today. It talks about the life

that waits for us. That is where our shepherd leads us. No matter what the path before us may hold, as long as we follow the Good Shepherd, who leads us on the right path, we will come to heaven's glory, where we will live in the joy of His presence forever.

The God of Grace, the Good Shepherd, who has called us to be His sheep through our baptism, is the same Shepherd who calls us to follow. Do you hear the voice of the Good Shepherd calling to you? Or is His voice drowned out by all the other voices of the world?

As we listen to His voice, as we trust in His guiding, He brings us to the safety of His perfect pasture—and to the life of peace and rest, free from the pains, the terrors or the dangers of this world. And nothing can take what our God gives to us. It will be ours forever. Amen.

“The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keeps your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior”. Amen