

Shepherd of our Sabbath
Psalm 23; John 10:11-18
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- I. If you have ever seen an image of Jesus the Good Shepherd with a white wooly lamb being carried on his shoulders, you have probably thought of this as a comforting image.
 - A. You may have given in to an idyllic vision of the shepherd in a clean robe
 - 1. effortlessly leading snowy white lambs
 - 2. through endless, perpetually green pastures.
 - B. Today I would like to dispel you of those notions.
 - 1. I would like you to understand what it means to call Jesus a good shepherd,
 - 2. and to truly comprehend what it means that we are being called sheep.
 - C. A good shepherd must protect the flock 24 hours a day, 7 days a week,
 - 1. grazing herds in isolated mountainous terrain.
 - 2. The Department of Labor has cited this as a reason not many U.S. workers are interested in this job.
 - D. What was true of shepherding in 1st century Palestine is still true today, all over the world.
 - 1. The life of a shepherd is dangerous, risky, and dirty.
 - 2. The shepherd has to constantly be on the lookout for strays.
 - 3. If a sheep gets turned over on its back, it cannot get up by itself.
 - 4. In just a few hours the sheep can die or be killed by predators.
 - E. A stray sheep that is on its back is called a cast sheep.
 - 1. The shepherd must slowly get the sheep on its side.
 - 2. the shepherd rubs its limbs to restore circulation,
 - 3. coaxing with words, gently lifting,
 - 4. and sometimes starting all over if the sheep staggers and falls again.
 - F. The good shepherd can't leave the sheep alone.
 - 1. There is danger from poisonous plants that spell certain death to sheep if they nibble even a few leaves.
 - 2. There are dangers from flooding rivers and rockslides.
 - 3. The good shepherd stays with the flock through storms of heavy wind, freezing rain, and deep snow.
 - 3. In ancient times, shepherds would sleep outdoors with the sheep
 - 4. and put their own bodies across the doorway of a stone-enclosed sheepfold to guard against predators.
 - G. A good shepherd must carefully observe the behavior of the flock for signs that they are agitated by flies.
 - 1. The flies lay eggs that hatch into larva that burrow into the sheep's flesh.
 - 2. The irritation is so severe that a sheep will bash its head against a rock or tree.
 - 3. In extreme cases, a sheep may kill itself trying to escape the irritation.

4. The attentive shepherd puts oil on the sheep's head and nose at the first sign of flies.
- H. The good shepherd must keep the flock supplied with fresh water
1. or they will become thirsty and restless and wander off in search of water.
 2. Sometimes the water is in deep caverns carved out of rock.
 3. The shepherd spend a lot of labor and money to dig wells.
 4. The work of leading the sheep down into the wells and bailing water is difficult, hot, heavy work.
- I. The Good Shepherd is on call 24/7, searches for every lost lamb,
1. tends to every hurting sheep,
 2. leads the flock to clean, living water and food to satisfy their hunger,
 3. protects them from danger,
 4. and - one more thing.
 5. It is the presence of the shepherd in the field that quiets and reassures the sheep.
- II. Now we turn our attention to the sheep - that's us in this metaphor.
- A. Sheep require more attention than any other class of livestock.
1. Sheep are aimless, fearful, stubborn, easily startled, always hungry, and stupid.
 2. We are sheep in desperate need of a shepherd.
- B. Sheep are creatures of habit.
1. Unattended, they will follow the same paths over and over until they become ruts.
 2. They will graze a field until there is nothing left but a barren wasteland.
 3. Left to follow the devices and desires of our own hearts, we, like the sheep, become victims of our own destructive habits.
- C. In sheep society, there is continual rivalry, tension and competition within the flock.
1. There is a butting order with which sheep seek to maintain their position in the flock.
 2. This constant bickering stresses all the sheep,
 3. and they become tense, restless, and discontented.
 4. Does this sound like your workplace, what our culture calls the 'rat race'?
- D. And then there is the tendency of sheep to wander.
1. There will be one sheep that will not follow the shepherd, determined to go its own way, and do its own thing.
 2. A wayward sheep is a vulnerable sheep that may become a cast sheep.
 3. The cast sheep just wants to relax a little, and rolls over on its side.
 4. Then suddenly they tip over on their backs and they can't get up.
 5. We're like that with our addictions: we start with something that feels good,
 6. we give in a little more, and the next thing we know, there is no turning back.
 7. We struggle but we cannot save ourselves.
- E. And there are also what shepherds refer to as fence crawlers.
1. A fence crawler is a sheep that always thinks the grass is greener on the other side of the fence.
 2. A fence crawler is never satisfied.

3. The fence crawler in us leads us to try many paths to fulfillment
 4. Any path that takes us away from the care of the Good Shepherd puts us in harms way, prime prey for a predator.
 5. Sometimes it is simply our own busyness, our push to do, to accomplish, to succeed that keeps us away.
 6. The predators swoop in and devour the health of our bodies, rob us of peace of mind.
- F. If we are sheep, then we must acknowledge that we often behave stupidly and that we have numerous perverse habits.
1. What we need, what I think we long for, is the care of a good shepherd.
 2. I was struck by the soothing care of the shepherd in Psalm 23.
 3. The 23rd Psalm is arguably the most beloved of biblical poems.
 4. Surely it must describe something we long for with all our heart.
 5. The Good Shepherd is one of the most familiar images of Jesus.
 6. I think we want the care of the Good Shepherd
 7. but we, like sheep, are so stuck in familiar ruts and mired in destructive habits that we don't know how to begin.
- G. We do have something sheep don't have - the God-given ability to choose.
1. We can choose to create times and places of rest and refreshment where we can more easily listen for the voice of the shepherd.
 2. We can choose counter-cultural habits that promote health and healing.
 3. The intent of engaging our entire community in the practice of Sabbath time is to find what it will take to restore our souls.
- H. Sabbath time helps to recalibrate the rhythm of our lives.
1. The world we live in follows a pattern of driven/escape.
 2. We drive hard during the week and on weekends we just want to escape.
 3. Escape may take the form of entertainment or mind-numbing activities like video games but it rarely involves true rest.
 4. Escape may mean hours spent on Facebook or in internet chat rooms
 5. but it fails to connect us with the good shepherd whose presence quiets us and reassures us.
 6. Sabbath time restores the rhythm that God created us for - the holy rhythm of ministry and Sabbath.
- I. Another way to look at the pattern of the world is to describe it as an adrenalin rush followed by numbing out.
1. What feeds your adrenalin rush that you need to put aside one day a week and truly rest?
 2. What is your favorite way of numbing out?
 3. What spiritual practices could you engage in one day a week that would truly bring you comfort?
- J. I think the 23rd Psalm can teach us about Sabbath time.
1. The first thing the good shepherd does is to make the sheep lie down.
 2. We do not rest enough - not in our society.

3. We don't take all of our vacation days.
 4. In 1969, married couples averaged 56 hours a week of work.
 5. By 2000, this had increased to 67 hours a week and it keeps rising.
 6. We drive hard during the week and want to escape on the weekends.
 7. Sabbath is not about going to church - it is about taking restful time to be with God and with our loved ones.
- K. The second thing the good shepherd does is to lead the sheep beside still waters.
1. We need respite from the agitation and irritation of demanding jobs and the stresses of daily living.
 2. We may not be plagued by flies, but tell me you've never felt like banging your head against a wall.
- L. The psalm then talks about a table being set for us.
1. Sharing a meal was sacred in biblical times.
 2. The average American eats one in every five meals in their car.
 3. The majority of American families eat a single meal together less than five days a week.
 4. Apart from shared meals as a part of Sabbath, did you know that
 5. children who do eat dinner with their parents five or more days a week have less trouble with drugs and alcohol, eat healthier, show better academic performance, and report being closer with their parents than children who eat dinner with their parents less often?
- M. Finally, the psalm talks about being anointed and having our cup overflowing.
1. Sabbath is about delight - in God and in each other.
 2. When I was in Israel, our seminary group was invited to share Shabbat with the kibbutz community where we were staying.
 3. Generally guests in a kibbutz have their own dining room, but that night we gathered with parents and children for a festive dinner in the communal dining room.
 4. There were two candles on each table to remember the dual commandment to remember the Sabbath and to keep it holy.
 5. We raised a glass of wine as the blessings were said and shared the challah bread that commemorates the manna that came from heaven.
 6. The Sabbath is a day of delight - time to be with God and with each other.
- N. The gospel of John says we know the voice of the shepherd and we listen to it.
1. How can we know the voice of God unless we take a Sabbath where we tune out all the competing voices?
 2. Ninety percent of Americans keep their cell phones within reach 24/7.
 3. Americans respond to emails in 90 minutes and to texts in just 90 seconds.
 4. I saw a sign that said - what would it be like if you prayed as often as you text?
- O. What might it mean to you and to your household if you observed Sabbath day each week?
1. Sabbath is the way that goodness and mercy flow through our lives.
 2. To keep the Sabbath is to surrender ourselves to the care of the Good Shepherd.