

PRAISE INTERNATIONAL

THE GOOD SHEPHERD, THE GOOD LIFE – A LIFE LIVED IN LOVE

JOHN 10:11-18, 1 JOHN 3:16-24

Good Morning

Prayer Needs

I woke up the other day asking myself ‘what was with that dream?’ Dreams can capture our imagination but many times they are more of a window to what is stirring in your heart - part of the reason its super helpful to have a wife who can psychologize me on the side!

The year was 1984 and I was nervously making a call to my Uncle in the Netherlands from a pay phone to confirm our arrival - which I had understood from my Dad would be when he would actually be in country. On the call I discovered that my Dad, step mom and sisters were traveling in Germany - that I would be arriving to my fathers home town and to my uncles home - an uncle I had only met once in my life as a 10 year old - and I had absolutely no idea how to find their home. Yes this was well before any digital directions - it was all maps and audible directions. Now I am speaking to my uncle who speaks very little English telling me where I could meet him and follow him to his home. As we approached the designated gas station my heart was pounding in my chest - would I recognize him? Beloved the only pictures I had of my parents home town were black and white - I only had a few photos of my Uncle Lukas and Aunt Rouellie that were grainy and faded.

As we approached Beilen I began to see the place my parents called home and interestingly the only images I could pull up in my memory were monochrome - that included horse drawn wagons...my parents grew up in the depression and left shortly after the war for Canada - in reality war refugees looking for a better life. What was unfolding before me was not black and white but a vibrant 20th century village - we pulled into a drive in front of a brick town home not a thatch roof house. A couple days later my Dad arrived from Germany and he took me to walk the village, the cemetery, and the location of the farm he had grown up in (the barn and house were now gone) and then at an impromptu stop he did something that I did not see coming - he began to call to the milk cows...and it was like I was watching something from another era - because I was - my Dad with his hat tilted to the side and these beautiful creatures almost running close to find him.

That is when I realized nope I will never be able to recall his hometown or its landmarks but I knew my Dad - the things that were IN him that captured his imagination most, faith, family and work. Truth be told I didn’t have to go the Netherlands to know my Dad - I mean it was really cool to get a context for his local windmill and the places he worked and played but its not the externals that define a person its whats in them and to be clear being in my Dad’s hometown did give context to his persona - but that is not what set the content of his life. So when my Dad picked up a hitchhiker while driving in Colorado and the young man said something about the cattle grazing in the fields they were driving by my father said - ‘My father owns those cattle - in fact He owns cattle on a thousand hills...’ the young man looked at my Dad - cowboy hat on in driving the eastern plains of Colorado with a thick accent and said ‘***your Dad must be rich!***’

Well I would have known immediately that my Dad was referring to his Heavenly Father’s rich’s of mercy and grace....(true story actually happened - cows and Jesus).

- Its is what was in my Dad that defined who he was and what he did.

And the secret is simply this Christ in you!
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Col 1:27b JB Phillips

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Almost everyone who has grown up around church is familiar with the Lords Prayer and with the OT Lords Prayer - 'The Lord is my Shepherd...I shall not want...'

- What Psalm is that? Who wrote that? - David and what was he?
- Who was his son? Who scripture records is asked for anything he wants and he asks for what? Wisdom.

What about the grandsons of the author of Psalm 23 - do you know them?

- **Rehoboam - Jeroboam...**

The grandsons of the author of the 23rd Psalm

- Divided the nation that drove them into civil war - set up new places of worship with golden calfs....
- These men who grew up in the shadow of worship because they concluded here is what defines being a leader - power, privilege, and prosperity at all costs... **a leader that strikes fear in their enemy and committed to success at all cost - that is what a leader looks like.**

Curiously almost all the nations surrounding Israel used a word and an image to portray what that leader looked like - a Shepherd!

- **The worlds definition of a Shepherd was the most powerful and dominant.**

The grandsons of David the Shepherd King looked at their lives and concluded - I think I understand what a Shepherd is... its like that - **the most influential and powerful.**

- Wisdom for the sons of Solomon was not about the heart but about consumption and control.

Yet David was anointed as King because of *he was a man after God's heart* - not because of how well he had done in business - **it is what was what was in his heart that lead his life.**

In our text today Jesus gives a short teaching about the Good Shepherd - that for most of us conjures pastoral images of a the guy taking care of the sheep...

- But for most 1st century Jews they were not thinking about a guy feeding sheep.
- They had heard stories....that filled their minds...ah yea a Shepherd...
- More powerful than other Shepherds like Egypt, Babylon, Assyria and now Rome....
- A Shepherd who will cast off our oppression...well like Judas Maccabees

I mean why are they in Jerusalem again?

- John 7 they are celebrating the festival of the lights....**Hanukkah**
- What was that about?
- The re-dedication of the temple under the Jewish Hasmonean dynasty that booted out the Greeks and Syrians for 30 years...
- All of that is documented in the apocryphal books that most of us don't have in our bibles...but Jesus read...and they celebrated the oil that burned for 8 days when they only had enough for one!

At the last a greatest day of the festival John 8 after forgiving an adulterous woman He says I am the light of the world and then in John 9 He heals a man born blind....and here in John 10 He says I am the Good (beautiful) Shepherd and interestingly in John 11 He raises the dead.

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Remember those 3 things – light, beauty and light....

Jesus in John 10 said I am the good Shepherd - who will not exert power like you have known it but I will lay my life down...

- And the Jews response vs 19-21 - *He is either demon possessed or insane!*

To a people looking for a ‘Shepherd’ Messiah - liberator whose best imagination of a good Shepherd was being under someone’s control and resisting that control by violence and force - Jesus reveals beauty that looks like a life lead and layed down in love.

Liberating life not defined by consumption, control and certainty but a life revealing the mystery of Christ in our midst - most visible by love revealed in a human life.

- **No wonder Johns epistle says we know we have passed from death to life if we love one another.**
- **Its here that the Good Shepherd is visible in our life.**
- **The good life is a life lead in love.**

In looking at today's gospel and epistle I am so encouraged - beloved no matter the changing times...political change, climate change, cultural change...the invitation of the Christian life is about God revealing God **in our day in our time IN our lives.**

I meditate on this almost daily - in the creation account what exists is what touch’s so many of our lives....darkness, void - empty and formless - chaos...God hovers and reveals light, life, order beauty....abundance....

Paul gives this commentary to creation in Romans 1:20

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, being understood by what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

Then He creates man to bear His image - this is huge idea that bears much thought....what did God have in mind for man when He created him....before their was sin...because that is what God has in mind for us today! Not just to remove sin and get you out of a mess - but that we actually become partners who bear His image who incarnate the eternal word in real time!

So when God is revealing Himself He creates a Place filled with light, life, beauty and abundance and places man in partnership in this place of beauty and abundance in a relationship that is not forced or controlled but rather in voluntary love! No ponder this according to the creation account God rested from His labor...the Hebrew writer proclaims God entered His rest...before man and satan fall - so ponder this the ‘Lamb slain before the foundation of the world’ is resting even when darkness, death and chaos renter the story and attempt to tell another story to His creation!

He rests knowing that it will not be by power, punishment, retribution or vengeance but in the full revelation of what began in a Garden God revealing God - that on the Cross He will reveal the fulness of love in self giving self emptying love and forgiveness that will restore, transform, make new and set the world right - it will reveal a new Kingdom.

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This is the power and wonder of John 10 - Jesus is coming to a people looking for a liberator and is literally revealing light, life and beauty and the conclusion of many - *this guy is either insane or demon possessed!*

What image comes to mind when you consider what it means for Jesus to be a Shepherd in your life? A life put together – in control – successful – abundant...healthy, wealthy and happy? He is a Good Shepherd....Lord teach me...

- I want to make an observation about Jesus words here in John 10 - that might even make us a bit uncomfortable....
- My sheep know my voice. He seems to be more confident in that reality than we are...vs 27
- Truth be told we all struggle with some doubt wondering am I getting that right?
- Jesus said you will know when it is Him!
- **Maybe we can give ourselves to believe what He said!** If what I am sensing He is saying is in the compassionate voice of love, joy, peace....(fruit of Spirit) maybe I can listen and trust it....

Here is how it is proclaimed in our 1 John 3;16-24

We know what true love looks like because of Jesus. He gave His life for us, and He calls us to give our lives for our brothers and sisters.

If a person owns the kinds of things we need to make it in the world but refuses to share with those in need, is it even possible that God's love lives in him? 1My little children, don't just talk about love as an idea or a theory. Make it your true way of life, and live in the pattern of gracious love.

There is a sure way for us to know that we belong to the truth. Even though our inner thoughts may condemn us with storms of guilt and constant reminders of our failures, we can know in our hearts that in His presence God Himself is greater than any accusation. He knows all things. 2My loved ones, if our hearts cannot condemn us, then we can stand with confidence before God. Whatever we may ask, we receive it from Him because we follow His commands and take the path that pleases Him. His command is clear: believe in the name of His Son, Jesus the Anointed, and love one another as He commanded. The one who follows His teaching and walks this path lives in an intimate relationship with God. How do we know that He lives in us? By the gift of His Spirit.

I know I have been sharing this is part of what I have been talking to God about in prayer - actually inviting God to a new imagination where I am asking God not just to fix my neighbor but that I trust what He does - that love is enough.

- Its enough for both the victim and the perpetrator - as one man put it - its enough for George Floyd and Derek Chauvin.
- Oh God I want to hold both of them in my heart as you hold them.

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Closing Prayer and Communion

O God, your Son remained with his disciples after his resurrection, teaching them to love all people as neighbors.

As his disciples in this age,
we offer our prayers on behalf of the universe
in which we are privileged to live
and our neighbors with whom we share it.

Open our hearts to your power moving
around us and between us and within us,
until your glory is revealed in our love of both friend and enemy,
in communities transformed by justice and compassion,
and in the healing of all that is broken. Amen.

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