

The Shepherd- A Consecrated Steward
(Third week in Consecrated Stewards Series)
May 2-4, 2009

Focus: **I am the Good Shepherd; I know My sheep and My sheep know Me—just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.**
(John 10:14-15)

There are times in life when we call on other people to provide assistance or services to us in our homes and lives. But as we do, we are looking for someone who is a good and credible worker. For example, if you were trying to buy hair restorer, would you choose to buy from a bald man or a man with a full head of hair? We know the answer, the man with the hair. Or if you need plumbing work, will you call the man whose own pipes leak and whose wife complains about leaking faucets? Of course not! When you are selecting someone to provide lawn care, would you choose someone whose own yard was filled with dandelions, dried grass, and weeds? Of course not! We look for those workers whose lives represent what they say they do for a living.

Now consider your own life. What kind of worker is God looking for here on earth? For this we need to seek God's guidance in the readings for today. The first reading is about a time when Peter and John encountered a man crippled from birth. Daily his friends brought him to the temple to beg from people. When Peter and John encountered this man, this is what Peter said and did.

Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. (Acts 3:6-8)

When they encountered this man, they gave what they had, nothing more, and nothing less. This faithfulness in the use of the gifts given them now allowed them to do something even more important.

If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Acts 4:9-10)

Now through the faithful use of their gifts of healing, they were able to declare the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ. We can only imagine them proclaiming as we do, **“Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!”**

The second reading provides another insight into being faithful servants of Christ. Now we are reminded do more than just say we love someone. We are called to action!

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. (I John 3:16-18)

This passage provides another understanding of using our talents and lives for the Lord. Now, we are called to lay down our lives. This is not something that is easy to do, yet Jesus emphasized it as He said,

Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. (John 15:13)

This idea of laying down one's life now points us to the One we call the Good Shepherd.

There are some important things to understand about this Good Shepherd. First of all, this Good Shepherd knows the sheep. Specifically, He knows that the sheep wander away. This is what the Prophet Isaiah indicated about us as sheep under the care of a shepherd.

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way... (Isaiah 53:6a)

There is a terrible consequence to wandering away from the shepherd. Wandering away is very dangerous. The Psalmist reminds us,

But man, despite his riches, does not endure; he is like the beasts that perish. This is the fate of those who trust in themselves, and of their followers, who approve of their sayings. Like sheep they are destined for the grave, and death will feed on

them. The upright will rule over them in the morning; their forms will decay in the grave far from their princely mansions. (Psalm 49:12-14)

Wandering away from the shepherd leads to death. In the same way, wandering away from the Good Shepherd also leads to death!

There is something else the Good Shepherd knows. He knows the wolf! The wolf is all around us, and at times even attacks inside the church itself. This is a warning from the Apostle Paul to the Ephesian Elders.

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God which He bought with His own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. (Acts 20:28-30)

We cannot even take comfort in the protection of the church for the wolf, or Satan, is especially at work among us, seeking to lead us to death!

It is important to now see what the Good Shepherd must do for the lost sheep. His actions are more than just talk. His life reflects exactly what He preaches. This Good Shepherd saw that the people He came to save were helpless.

When He (Jesus) saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. (Matthew 9:36)

We have wandered away, either to find supposedly greener pastures, or simply because we think we know more than the Good Shepherd. Because we have done this, the Good Shepherd must Himself become the meal for the wolf. This is how Peter described it.

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. (I Peter 1:18-19)

He became that meal on the cross of Calvary where He was seemingly eaten alive by Satan. But God's plan was much better than the plan of the wolf. For God cast Jesus into the mouth of the

wolf so that we might not only be spared a terrible death, but so that we might be brought back to safety as the wolf feasted at the cross. Peter reminds us,

He (Jesus) Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by His wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. (I Peter 3:24-25)

But the power of the wolf cannot overcome the power of the loving Father of this Good Shepherd. Even though death seemed to be the end, the Father saw it differently. Death was only the end of sin and shame. The grave had no power over this Good Shepherd. On the third day the life He laid down has now been raised up. We continue to rejoice in the wonderful message, “**Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**”

Now we are spared from death and the grave so that we might live as Consecrated Stewards. As Consecrated Stewards, we are like Peter and John. We are asked to give only what we have. God doesn't expect us to do things he has not given us the ability to do. We simply give and do what God has enabled us to do. As we do, we also look for those opportunities to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus. This even makes everything different. This event gives new life to us as we now are able to set aside our failures as Consecrated Stewards, and begin again in our service to Jesus. Now we, like Jesus, are allowed to lay down our life, but in a different way. Now our entire life and being is to be devoted to God's call to service.

This is exactly what the hymn tells us today. We have used this hymn for three weeks in a row, and will use it again next week. It reminds us of how God blesses us to use our talents for him.

**Take my life and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee;
Take my moments and my days,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.**

**Take my hand and let them move
At the impulse of Thy love;**

**Take my feet and let them be
Swift and beautiful for Thee.**

**Take my voice and let me sing
Always, only for my King;
Take my lips and let them be
Filled with messages from Thee. (LSB 783)**

Today you have the opportunity to think about how your life can benefit the Good Shepherd and other sheep. There is a lime green sheet in your bulletin that is titled, "Imagine the Possibilities." On this sheet are many different ways in which you might be able to serve Christ and His kingdom. It is a chance for you to think about new ways to serve the Good Shepherd. It is a way to serve with action, and not just talk. As you have a few moments in the service, or as you pray about this at home, we ask you to fill this out and return it to us so we know how you want to serve. You can leave it on the offering table or bring it to the church office. As you do, remember God's call to be a Consecrated Steward, as we look to the One who has consecrated our lives, Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd! Amen.