

**Reading** John 10:1-18

## **Sermon: 3 May 2009**

The text for the sermon verse 11:

“ I am the good shepherd, who is willing to die for the sheep”

Our reading this morning contains quite a number of hidden secrets. For one this passage needs to be understood in the context of verse 22 which says that it happened at the time of the Feast of Dedication. This feast was first initiated in the year 164 Before Christ as a feast in honor of the restoration of divine worship in the temple. The background was that Antiochus Epiphanes, a Syrian which was the emperor then dishonored the temple of God by erecting a Greek altar on the site of the old one. It happened on the 25 of the month Chislev, a day that falls at various points in our calendar month of December in the year 167. He worshipped the Greek god Zeus. He called himself Epiphanes which meant “(god) manifest”. A Jewish rebellion broke out when a priest called Mattathias and his five sons, rebelled against these evil practices of Antioch. After three years of bloody fights, they managed to dedicate the temple again on the same day 25 Chislev 164 b c. This feast lasted for 8 days and later became the Feast of Lights or “Hanukkah” – the only Jewish festival not ordained in the Hebrew Bible because of the custom of illuminating the houses while celebrating it.

In the context of our reading Jesus is actually referring to this event that happened a long time ago. He is telling his readers that the Jewish leaders are just like Antioch. They are misleading the people with their wrong perceptions and in the process reject the true message from God. He Jesus is send by God and is therefore God himself. He is the only true Shepherd in contrast to the Jewish leaders or Antioch who is like the hired shepherds who only cares about themselves. John’s readers could also easily rely on the richness of the Old Testament texts with regard to God as the Shepherd in texts such as Ezekiel 34, Jeremiah 23 and Psalm 23, which identify the Lord as the true shepherd in contrast to the false shepherds of Israel.

It is then within this context that Jesus explains to his listeners why He is the only True Shepherd. But to us this image Jesus is portraying does not make sense especially because our understanding of farming with sheep is totally different form sheep farming in Biblical times. Sheep were very important to the people of Biblical times. Sometimes it was their only source of income. They had many usages of sheep – they could make clothes from the wool, they could make shoes from the sheep’s skin, they could eta the meat of the sheep and they could drink milk from the sheep. Palestine was a very dry place and sometimes people hired Shepherds to stay with their sheep, sleep with their sheep in order to protect them form wild animals. Usually they had sheep pens enclosed by stone walls with only one entrance which could have been a break in the walls. It was also custom for the shepherd to sleep across the opening to serve as a gate and protector of the sheepfold. Anyone that did not use the main gate

could not have good intentions. The shepherd would then in the mornings talk to the sheep and lead them with his voice to green pastures and safe waters. They were used to his voice and followed him. The shepherds would know the sheep by name.

Jesus says to his listeners He is this shepherd that will protect his children. His love for his sheep is his utmost goal. He is the only entrance to the everlasting kingdom, unlike the Jewish leaders who teaches them differently. He is even committed to sacrifice his own life for his sheep. He is commanded by God as the Father to die in order for the sheep to live in al eternity. But Jesus clearly emphasize it is because of his love for them.

I think in the past a lot of sermons were made focussed on the metaphor of Jesus as shepherd and what it means for us today. I however could not help but wonder but what about another approach to this text. What about the sheep? What about you and me? What about the lost sheep? What are the consequences for us regarding this passage?

Well I think to start off we can sometimes be led astray from the Good Shepherds voice. We can sometimes be misled by what our world offers us. It is so easy to follow the voice of our world. It is so easy to sleep in on a Sunday and not come to church. It is so easy to cheat and lie just as some people around us do. It is so easy to be engulfed by the unbelief of some of the people that we work and live with. It is so easy even not to read our Bibles and pray. It is so easy to loose control and just join the majority of non believers. It is so easy to be swept away by the negativity of our world. There are still a lot of wolves around us to blind us from the presence of God in our daily lives. A lot of wolves that tells us things happen only by chance and not by Godly destiny.

We are the sheep that knows the voice of our shepherd. We have to commit ourselves to follow him wherever He wants us to go. And this is our challenge because it is not always easy. We will be like sheep that is destined to be slaughtered because of our faith. But we have God's Holy Spirit who will help and guide us. He will show and tell us what to do when the wolves are crying out to deafen the voice of the Good Shepherd. We also have God's Holy word that becomes his words more and more as it changes our lives completely. But we have to make the commitment in faith alone to trust the Lord with everything, with the good and the bad. We have to carry the deep rooted assurance in us to know He does not make mistakes. He never sleeps or dozes off. He never goes on holiday. He is always available when and wherever we are.

We have to be the sheep God intended us to be:

- sheep that knows the difference between real hope and false hope, real trust and doubt, real love and fake cheap love!
- Sheep who will follow the Shepherd because they know He is taking them to the everlasting kingdom where there will be no more wolves to lead them away from his presence;
- Sheep that listens out to the voice of God when they have to make decisions;
- Sheep that feels safe to be in the presence of the Lord;
- But also sheep that will talk to other sheep that does not have the security and

safety of the Good Shepherd;

- Sheep that make sure they also hear his voice when ever they are talked to ...

This text emphasises to us the importance of what our following of Jesus really means. We can in our following be human shepherds helping and protecting the vulnerable in our society. We can be the voices who protest the evil in our world. We can be the beacon light for everyone that needs the presence of God's love and acceptance in daily living. But in order to be *this sheep* we have to change our lives radically. We have to forget about ourselves and focus on God and what He is telling us. We can have as many house groups, actions and bible studys as we like, but if we as a congregation do not listen to the voice of our Saviour we are lost and without hope. If we as a congregation do not follow Jesus and drag others with us we are not the sheep He intended us to be. If we are not going to tell others about our Lord the Shepherd, we can close these church doors today.

May others who feels lost and without the comforting voice of the Good Shepherd see Him in our acts of love, in our soft whispering, in our breaths of hope and in our sparkling laughter ....If you are feeling lost and without hope this morning do not despair. Wait on the Good Shepherd, He will come and pick you up and carry you through the dark valleys to bring you to a place of comfort and rest. Just have faith...

Amen

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## Readings for the week

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John 10:1-16 (taken from the website of [www.rootsontheweb.com](http://www.rootsontheweb.com))

Jesus is rarely in the New Testament described directly as God. Instead, the writers repeatedly ascribe to him activities no titles or descriptions that properly belong to God, Here Jesus identifies himself with the Good Shepherd who n the Old Testament, stands for God, Ezekiel 34 makes a contrast with the bad shepherds, who neglect and exploit their flocks: Psalm 23 gives details of the painstaking care provided by the true herdsman. In John, Jesus contrasts the shepherd with the hired hand: the one abandons his charges at the first sign of danger: the other faces death for the sake of his sheep. The extension of the Old Testament metaphor is striking: Jesus identifies himself with God precisely in his self-giving death. Jesus claim is that his relationship with the Father, one of mutual love and knowledge, is the source of his love and knowledge of his sheep. They are his own: the Greek word 'idios' is used of members of ones family. It is the unity between Father and Son that makes unity among the sheep

an imperative. That is why the other sheep will become part of one and the same flock. Some scholars argue that the other sheep are scattered groups of Jewish Christians in John's own day, facing persecution by the synagogues; most think that they are the non-Jews who will eventually become Christians. In either case, the readers are reminded that they are all linked as members of one family through the one shepherd.

**Other readings:** Acts 4,5-12, Psalm 23 & 1 John 3.16-24.