

Study Guide for April 22, 2018

Readings: Acts 4:5-12; Psalm 23; 1 John 3:16-24; John 10:11-18

Theme: The Good Shepherd

In John's Gospel Jesus boldly declares, "I am the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep." This is one of the seven times Jesus uses the phrase "I am" identifying himself to his followers in the same way God describes himself to Moses (Exodus 3:14). When asked to go back to Egypt to free the Israelites, God says to Moses, "Tell them I AM sent you." Jesus knew exactly what he was doing when he made these statements. He was equating himself with God. For this reason alone, the Jewish leaders had reason to execute him. Knowing this, Jesus reveals his divine nature to his followers. While this brings confusion and sadness to his closest friends, it continues to give us hope today.

Pope John Paul II once said, "God has, in fact, thought of us from eternity and has loved us as unique individuals. He has called every one of us by name, as the Good Shepherd 'calls His sheep by name.'" As the church, we are Christ's flock. We must know our shepherd, and be able to recognize his voice in order to follow him faithfully, and with full awareness, towards the pastures of eternal life. From the psalmist to the Apostles to those first gathered in their homes to us today, God's truth continues to reveal itself to us through Jesus Christ. How blessed are we to be the flock of a God who is powerful, faithful, and always seeking us whenever we wander off.

Read: Acts 4:5-12; Psalm 118:22; Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; 1 Peter 2:7
While Peter and John's declaration in Acts doesn't speak directly to the concept of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, they use scripture to describe Jesus in a way that sets the foundation for the church herself where we will learn to become the sheep called to follow faithfully the Shepherd. The context of this passage in Acts comes after Peter and John were preaching and rejoicing in the glory of the resurrected Christ. They had been healing the sick and doing "good deeds," which as really annoyed the priest of the temple. So, they were arrested and asked, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" They seem to already know the power and the name, but do Peter and John make the same messianic claim. Like good sheep, they follow the Good Shepherd.

Q: What phrase or description of Jesus stands out to you?

Q: In looking Peter and John's declaration in Acts, how might it guide your relationship with Christ? How might you describe that relationship to others?

Q: How might the Spirit of Christ shepherd your faith when faced with a situation like Peter and John find themselves in?

Prayer starter: Loving Shepherd, I pray that you will guide me today in your wisdom and truth, and point me in the direction that you want me to faithfully go. Amen.

Read: 1 John 3:16-24

First John was written to a community apparently besieged by antichrists; but the overall message of this epistle is one of love and that God is love. In the first part of this chapter, we are reminded that we are children of God, and that even though we sin we are loved and redeemed. The passage for today is directly linked to the gospel reading. It declares that Jesus laid down his life for us, and we should be willing to do the same for each other.

Q: John said, *"We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us – and we ought to lay down our lives for one another."* In what ways are you willing to do this for the people you love? What about your enemies? Or strangers you do not know?

Q: How prepared are we to blindly follow the Good Shepherd? Are you able to believe without seeing; to love without knowing; and to sacrifice without losing?

Q: How might the Spirit of Christ shepherd your faith as John suggests?

Prayer starter: Lord Christ, you laid down your life for me so that I might be lifted up with you through death and difficult times. Today I pray to be lifted up higher than ever. Amen.

Read: John 10: (1-10) 11-18

Jesus juxtaposes the "good shepherd" against the "hired hand." The difference is not in their capacity to take care of sheep but in true ownership of the flock and responsibilities. The good shepherd owns the sheep; we are his and he is ours. The hired hand just looks out for his own interest and bails whenever danger lurks. The Good Shepherd takes care of his sheep even if it means giving up his own life to protect them. Jesus reminds us that we are his and he is ours. He not only laid down his life for you and me, but God also raised him up for his faithful service. How blessed are we to be a part of His divine flock?

Q: What is most comforting to you when you think of yourself as one of God's sheep?

Q: Is there somewhere in your life that you need God to shepherd you to or from?

Q: How might the Spirit of Christ shepherd your faith to share this message to others?

Prayer starter: Gentle and Good Shepherd, I sometimes think that I am not always worthy to be your lamb. Thank you for not seeing me as I see myself. Help me today to follow you through every event in my life so that I will always be able to sing your praises. Amen.

Slow Read: Psalm 23

As you read through this most familiar passage, imagine the different ways God's tenderness and compassion is present in your life.

Prayer: Lord God, you are the Good Shepherd who leads me and comforts me through every season of my life. Make your Spirit known to me in this moment so that I may stay on the right paths, and dwell in your house forever. Amen.