**Shepherd Love**

Based on [John 10:21-25](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Jn10.21-25)

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The Third Sunday of Easter ~

Misercordias Domini

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One of the most cherished images given in scripture is God as our Shepherd. It might not resonate to us much today, because we don’t have shepherds in our industrialized part of the world…at least not in the same way. But in ancient times and in less developed parts of the world, livestock animals had to be taken care of personally, not from a distance, as a shepherd takes care of his sheep.

David was a shepherd before he became King of Israel. He wrote, “**The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lied down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his names sake…**”. King David, a man after the Lord’s own heart, set the mould, as it were, for the messiah to be figured like a shepherd.

In the days of Ezekiel, there were “false shepherds” in Israel. They were priests who were neglecting the job of guiding and directing Israel in the way it should go. Such false shepherds, God said, were “**getting fat off of the sheep.**” They would **shove the sheep with side and shoulder**, **and scatter the weak abroad**, they would **trample and muddy the water so the sheep could not drink**. Literally speaking, they would receive the status and recognition, the authority and praise and wealth that comes with being a leader of people, a shepherd of sheep…but they would abuse them, not shepherd them; and insodoing they would drive them away from the Lord.

So God promised, “**I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out…and rescue them and feed them with good pasture in Israel. I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and strong I will destroy**.” This is a prophesy of the Messiah by Ezekiel. And notice how he preaches. Notice how the messiah will come, to rescue the weak and to destroy the fat and the strong.

So often today, it is vogue to focus on God’s love in its ***positive*** aspect. God’s love compels Him to send his son to save his people, to rescue them, heal them, bind them up, and lead them as a shepherd leads his flock. But love also has a ***negative aspect***. Love fights against those who mean to do harm. Love is fierce against those who have evil intent. If someone tries to harm your child, you will fight them…and you will call the police and have them arrested.

The other negative aspect of love is that it is ***outraged against indifference.*** I remember hearing a while ago about a woman, I believe she was in inner city New York, who was stabbed repeatedly and murdered publically in the streets. She was screaming for help. People were home, it was a big city certainly it was heard. But nobody came to her aid, nobody even called the police. Maybe they had become desensitized to such screams, or they were scared to get involved. In either case, the relatives of the murdered woman were angry. Why did nobody help her? How can people just stand by and go about their business while someone is being murdered in their midst?

Love cares for the weak; Love also fights against those who harm the weak. And love is offended by heartlessness and indifference. As Christ says to the church in Laodicea, “Because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth”. All this is figured in to Jesus’ illustration of the Good Shepherd. *The Good Shepherd is* one who cares for the weak sheep, even lays down his life for them. The *wolf* is the one who harms the weak, intent on evil and will accomplish it if he is not stopped by the shepherd. And the *hired hand* is the one who is indifferent to injustice, doesn’t harm the sheep, but cares nothing for their protection either. The Wolf kills the sheep. The hired hand cares nothing for the sheep. The Good shepherd so loves the sheep, that he lays down his life for the sheep.

This is all, of course, a picture of Jesus, Satan, and the church. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who so loved the world that he died for it. Only he didn’t die accidentally, his death was the means whereby he would save his sheep from the wolf.

The wolf is satan, the devil and all his angels too. The wolf is not described in great detail, but you get the idea. The wolf wants devour the sheep. He wants to prey upon them and take advantage of their weakness to make himself strong. This is appropriate for Satan. The bible doesn’t talk much about how his motives developed, why he is bent on the damnation of humanity. He just is. A wolf is a wolf, and the devil is a liar and a murderer. No need for an expose, was he jealous that God created man…does he have a reason for who he is. There’s a lot of lore, a lot of apocryphal scripture, a lot of high artistic poetry that speculates on why Satan broke bad. It doesn’t really matter in the end. He is the wolf; don’t trust him, don’t pet him, stay away from him, and follow the voice of the shepherd who will not be fooled.

What is most revealing is the hired hand, and how he is set in contrast to the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd’s love for the sheep is genuine, and it is proven in what he does. When push comes to shove, when the going gets tough, he will die for them, in their place, for their sake. That’s true love. But the hired hand takes oaths to that extent, but when the sheep are in danger and his own life is on the line he flees. In wartime, a mercenary is a soldier who is paid to fight. Not a very dependable soldier in the end, because if he is only fighting for money, he needs to survive in order to have it. So he might fight, and he might even die accidentally, but if he believes he will lose the fight he will flee, even if it leads to the slaughter of everyone else. And this isn’t only from a moment’s cowardice that can overcome anyone. It’s a way of life, for someone who cares only for themselves will not willingly die for anything or anyone. They will profess love, but only as a means to an end. When the rubber meets the road, and love calls for sacrifice, he will offer up the first sheep he can to the slaughter in his place.

So it was that when the lamb of God himself was led to be crucified, Pontius Pilate, the hired hand governor of Judea, washed his hands of Jesus’ blood. And the people shouted, “Let his blood be on us and our children.” The people, representing all humanity, even you and me—were offering up Jesus as the lamb of sacrifice for their sins in their place. He was our substitute, and we bear the guilt of his death so long as we refuse to believe and live lives for ourselves rather than for God. By going to the cross willingly, at our provocation, he brought to the surface our sinful, self-serving, scapegoating hearts. His crucifixion lays our sins before our eyes. And those who refuse to see remain in their guilt; but those who look and repent and believe pass through the valley of the shadow of death and are led beside still waters, and the Lord will restore their soul, and resurrect their body.

**24**He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. **25**For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.