

But, Jesus, Surely You .... John 10:11-18

Saint Marks United Methodist Church, Charleston, WV 4th Sunday of Easter Sunday (April 26) 2015

<sup>11</sup> I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. <sup>13</sup> He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. <sup>14</sup> I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, <sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> ***And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.*** <sup>17</sup> For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. <sup>18</sup> No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

Today is the Fourth Sunday in our Easter Series: THE IMAGES OF JESUS. Easter Sunday was the Empty Tomb, and the Picture we used was AN EMPTY PICTURE FRAME. The next Sunday was the JOYFUL JESUS and we had pictures of Jesus laughing. Last week, we looked at **THE FULL HUMANITY OF JESUS**. Today, we focus upon this very, very popular and comfortable image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd.

A long time ago, in what to the many younger than me will think of as in a galaxy far, far away, there used to be a television show called *The Twilight Zone*. It was show that featured (at that time, and I daresay: even today) very creative and provocative storylines – some called it science fiction, but I think it went beyond that limiting title.

In a show from Season 5, entitled “Probe Seven, Over and Out,” an astronaut, Colonel Adam Cook, crash landed on a planet, whose atmosphere is much like Earth’s atmosphere. When he radios home, asking for help, he received discouraging news. They are not able to send him a replacement spaceship to rescue him at the present time. Indeed, the home is under a security alert from an attack by another nation. Everything is on lock down. Colonel Cook decides to check out the planet where he has crash landed. He

discovers that he can move about without need for space gear, even oxygen. It is very human friendly atmosphere.

As he moves about on the planet, he keeps hearing a noise, as though someone is following him. He is nervous. Finally the stalker throws a rock and hits him in the head. He goes down, unconscious. When he awakens, he finds that his attacker is a woman. They discover that neither one is a threat to the other. She, too, has crash landed there from another planet.

Cook and his new companion learn to communicate with one another and then return to his spaceship. He gets on the radio once more and talks to the home base, only to find out that the nation is about to be wiped out by the invading army. They give him the disturbing news that he is on his own. He will have to make a new life for himself there on the new planet. No help will apparently ever arrive.

Despondent, Colonel Cook sits down. His female companion reveals to him her name: she is EVE Norda. Do you remember that I told you Colonel Cook's first name is ADAM. Here are Adam and Eve left to make a new life; no help is coming. The show ends.

**When I first watched the show, I ASSUMED that Colonel Cook was coming from OUR planet to this alien planet. By the end of the show, I realized my mistake. I had thought he was one of us, in an alien setting. Now, I conceived that he was the alien from a far advanced place who had come and would now populate planet Earth.**

Sci-fi? Yes.

Interesting, or perhaps weird, story line? Of course; it was the Twilight Zone.

**But what was it about a November 29, 1963 television show that came to mind two weeks ago when I began to dance with today's Gospel lesson?**

**It's that pesky verse 16.**

Oh, we love the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd.

Jesus as the New Testament embodiment of Psalm 23, "The Lord is my Shepherd."

Jesus takes care of me.

Jesus charms my fears.

Jesus is the antidote for my worries. He holds me in His strong and tender arms, like a lamb carried back to the fold, even when I am in the Valley of the darkest shadow.

But there is that pesky verse 16: **And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.**

**And that's why the Twilight Zone episode came back to mind. With that television show, I ASSUMED that Colonel Cook was one of my people. By the end of the show, I had to wrap my head around the notion that he was NOT one of my people; HE was the alien. But, by and through him, I came into being.**

**We have a tendency to think that WE are THE flock of which Jesus is the Shepherd, and there are THOSE OTHER people He is going to go offer admission to MY FLOCK.**

Well, right off the bat, it's not science fiction, it's nothing more than simple first grade Bible study: Jesus was a JEW. The Gentiles (that's what

you and I would have been called back then – as non-Jews) were the OTHER PEOPLE.

When Jesus' first disciples heard this, they *may have been* resistant to opening up the flock door to **US—you and me**.

Well, "*may have been*" is a bit of a misnomer. The Jewish Conference in Acts chapter 15 was the first dispute to go on in the Church. Paul wanted to bring US into the flock and the original members of Jesus' flock weren't so sure that we ought to come in.

**It was not being "politically correct" that the outsiders were allowed to come in. It was the Will of God that those not welcome should be welcomed.** OUR PEOPLE were allowed to come in.

And yet, TODAY, when we hear Jesus talking about those outside the flock, we forget that He was talking about us. We hear His words and think of THOSE OTHER PEOPLE as being the outsiders – not us.

*But, Jesus, surely you don't mean "them."*

The great Swiss theologian of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Karl Barth, pointed out that there is **NO SUCH THING** as an individual Christian. In the English language there is no different word for **ONE SHEEP** versus a flock of **SHEEP**. "Sheep." Just "sheep."

Two weeks ago, in Janet's sermon scripture we heard the words from 1 John 2:2 that Jesus "*is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the WHOLE WORLD.*" **EVERYBODY.**

The flock of which Jesus is the Shepherd, we are reminded AGAIN in today's Gospel – **EVERYBODY.**

- Our problem is when WE FORGET that we were once on the outside looking in.
- Our problem is when WE THINK THAT JESUS HAS INSIDERS AND OUTSIDERS.

*But, Jesus, surely you don't mean....*

That's a distinction WE MAKE – not one Jesus makes.

Now, I am very, very proud of the hospitality that Saint Marks offers on two Friday nights of each month. (And we are going to move to THREE Friday nights a month, in July.)

But, here's one problem that I have with this. There are still some people who think WE are offering something to THEM.

Somebody just suggested an antidote for this wrong-headed thinking: **Instead of thinking we are sharing what is ours; remember that WE ARE ALSO GUESTS; all that we are holding onto comes from, and belongs to, God; we are guests, also.**

It's ALL "US."

**Who is it that you think of as being "THEM"? Here's today's Gospel flash: Jesus does not.**

I'm going to be honest and admit that I still have "them"s – even when I try to be kind, to be generous, to be hospitable – I admit that I still am doing it for THEM. *But Jesus is not done with me yet, and I trust that He's not done with you, either.*

Can you remember the last time you felt like an outsider?

- When you were not in the "in crowd" in junior high/middle school?

- When you had not attended the church long enough to be a “trustee”?
- When you had not earned the trust of someone you cared about?
- When your \_\_\_\_\_ was not seen as good enough?
- When someone held onto what you needed and they didn’t think you qualified to receive it

**Tougher question:** when was the last time you made someone feel like an outsider? What’s so hard about it is that we sometimes do it without even realizing it.

But Jesus – Jesus ALWAYS is looking to make people feel welcome, to feel good enough, to feel like they are part of the flock. ONE FLOCK. No us and them. ONE FLOCK.

It’s not always easy. I know. I know. But it’s what we are about. **We are AMBASSADORS for the KINGDOM OF GOD. We are not allowed to have higher standards that Jesus does. He’s the boss.**

Try this: **next week just to pay attention.** Pay attention to how people around you are feeling. Try to pay attention to what you are doing, or saying. “Am I making someone feel not good enough? Am I making someone to feel like an outsider? How would Jesus treat this person?”

Those are SHEPHERD THOUGHTS – the Shepherd of ONE FLOCK. And what Jesus says He will do, **He WILL do.** If we say that Jesus is Lord, let’s try to not get in His way, OK?

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.