

He Lays Down His Life

John 10:11-18

The Fourth Sunday of Easter, April 26, 2015

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He takes care of you. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He lays down His life for you. No one takes His life from Him. He has authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This commandments Jesus received from His Father.

Jesus is your good shepherd. He is not just any good shepherd. He is your good shepherd. He takes care of you. You are His own and He is yours. He takes care of you even to laying down His life for you.

There are things in the world that are out to kill us.

Satan is out to kill us. He wants our death. He wants our death in this world and he wants our death in the world to come. He wants us dead as soon as possible in this world and he wants us in hell with him forever. He is not sane. He is not rational about it. Some pastors have speculated that Satan wants company in hell and he mistakenly believes that if he can dupe enough of us into going there that he will have company. Nowhere does Satan give that kind of indication. He is not interested in company whether true or false. He is not interested in building anything not even anything that would service him over the long term. He is only interested in one thing: his hatred of God.

Satan embodies hatred of God. He hates God with an everlasting hatred. He hates everything about God. He hates what God does. He hates what God says. He hates what God creates. He hates what God creates not because he hates it in and of itself. He hates it because God made it and Satan hates God. Satan must ultimately therefore hate himself because he himself was made by God. Satan hates that he was made by God. He resents that fact. He is in rebellion against that fact. He wants to believe that he is in charge. He does not want God in charge at all.

Satan cannot touch God. God is almighty and all powerful. So in order to get at God and hurt God Satan attacks you. You are God's creation. In order to attack God in the only way that he can Satan attacks God's creation. He comes after you. He hates you because God made you.

When Satan presents himself to you, he will present himself as your friend. He will pretend to be "on your side." He will pretend like he wants to give you power or understanding or blessing. But do not be deceived Satan wants nothing of the kind for you. He wants your death. He wants you in hell. He will make sure that whatever he presents to you that is attractive is something that will be against God's will. Remember Satan wants to oppose God on all fronts. He wants to attack God in every way. You are God's creation. Satan is not interested in blessing you. He is not interested in your welfare. He doesn't even want to give you power although he presents himself that way when he is tempting you. He only wants your destruction. He wants you to die.

The only thing that Satan and the demons have in common is their hatred of God. It is not like they have signed some kind of agreement to work together. It is not like they sit around and plan how they might build an empire long term. They are interested only in destroying what God has made. The union that they do display is only a union of hatred against God. This is why they appear to be coordinated. This is why Satan's empire appears to be united. They at least agree on one thing. They believe that God is evil and oppressive. They believe that God is a dictator in charge of the creation. They believe that the creation would be better off with them in charge. They will stop at nothing to destroy God's creation. They will stop at nothing to destroy you.

They are out to kill you.

They have organized things in the world that are designed to kill you. They have used the world against us to tempt us. They have used what God has said against us to tempt us. They have used things that looked good to us to harm us. They have used things that felt right to us to lead us into evil. They have used God's own righteousness against us so that we did the most evil of things in the name of God. They will use our friends against us. They will use our families against us. They will use the most trusted people in our lives against us. They will work through these means in order to bring us to sin and from sin to despair of the grace of God.

They want you faithless and in hell.

Because the situation is a life and death situation the Good Shepherd is called upon to lay down His life for the sheep. Because Satan is after our death, He will not be satisfied until there is a death. He will not be satisfied until he can see that there is no way to win the battle against God. Satan has used the law of God itself against us. He uses the Law in order to accuse us of the sins that he himself tempted us to do. The law demands our death for our sins. How will the Good Shepherd rescue us from that?

The Good Shepherd will offer His life in place of our life. When He does so Satan is defeated. He is over. He is done. Satan cannot use your sins against you to frighten you. He cannot use your sins against you in order to silence you. He cannot use your sins against you in order to convince you that you are damned so that you will despair of the grace of God. Satan cannot do this because our sins cost us our lives and Jesus has laid down His life in our place.

This above all things shows us who the Good Shepherd is. He is the one who lays down His life for His sheep. The Good Shepherd is not a hired man. A hired man is a good man. A hired man is a man who cares for the sheep. The hired man is not an evil man. He is not there to destroy the sheep. He means the sheep no harm, but he is just a hired man. He will get paid for the day's work because he put in the day's work. But the sheep are not his. They are not his sheep. Because they are not his sheep he has no long term investment in them. When he sees Satan coming, he runs away. He does not really care about the sheep when it counts. That is how you can tell the hired men are in your life. They mean well. They are after your spiritual good, but when something comes along and you are really counting on them to help you they take off. They especially take off if whatever it is that you are facing will cost the hired man in some fashion. Anything that would require the hired man to make an investment in the sheep beyond his daily chores is something that makes him leave.

The Good Shepherd is not like that. God the Father did not hire Jesus to love you. God the Father does not promise some great reward for loving you. In other words Jesus does not love you because He knows that if He lays down His life for you the Father will reward Him with eternal glory and resurrection from the dead and the ascension into heaven. While Jesus does receive those things and has those things, that is not why He laid down His life. Jesus did not hang there on the cross and think to Himself, "Ok, just two more hours to go and the glory will be mine."

If the Good Shepherd were like that, the Good Shepherd would be a hireling. He would be no better than a common labor man working for someone because he needs his daily bread and not because he enjoys his work or is committed to it.

The Good Shepherd is loyal to His sheep. Even when it costs Him His life He will not leave His sheep. Even when the wolf comes, He will not leave the sheep. He will not allow you to be scattered by Satan or by any of his forces. You belong to the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life of His own accord.

It is true that the Father commanded the Good Shepherd to lay down His life for the sheep. But that is not why that Jesus does it. Jesus is the equal of the Father. Jesus says that He has authority to lay His life down and He has authority to take His life up again. No one takes it from Him. He lays it down of His own accord.

He loves you willingly. He loves you because He wants to love you. He loves you on purpose. He loves and would have laid down His life for you even if He had received no glory for it whatsoever. This is why when Jesus dies He says, "It is finished," and not after He rises again from the dead. It is truly finished when He dies. His love for you is completed. Your sins are atoned. They are forgiven. You are saved from any accusation that Satan may bring against you. "It is finished." The Good Shepherd laid down His life for His sheep.

You are His sheep, but there are other sheep that are not yet members of our congregation. Jesus will bring them also. They will hear His voice. When they hear His voice they will become acquainted with Him. They will know Him. The only way to know Jesus is to listen to His voice. They will listen to His voice and they will join our congregation.

The voice of Jesus is recorded in the Scriptures. The Scriptures are the living voice of Jesus. He speaks to people in them. They hear His voice and they follow Him. Through His voice He leads them. They become part of our congregation.

They will know Jesus just like the Father and the Son know each other. The Father and the Son know one another completely. The Good Shepherd already knows everything there is to know about His sheep. He is, after all, the Good Shepherd. In order for the sheep to know the Good Shepherd the way that the Father and the Son know one another, the sheep listen to His voice. The Good Shepherd will speak to them and in speaking to them, He will lead them.

He will guide them into the paths of righteousness. He will guide them through the valley of the shadow of death. He will bring them to His eternal home. And there will be one flock and one shepherd.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.