

**April 21, 2024 – Good Shepherd Sunday**

**“Jesus the Good Shepherd” by Pastor Julio Romero**

**Gospel: John 10:11-18**

*“I am the Good Shepherd”* the Lord Jesus says, and then He goes to explain why He is the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd is the one who lays down his life for the sheep, He said.

As I reflect on what a good shepherd does, I think of all the things a shepherd does to earn that title. For example, a good shepherd is the one who makes sure his sheep have green and fresh pasture, water, shelter when needed, healing when they get sick, protection from predators.

A good shepherd is one who guides his sheep and who cares for every single one of them.

What a good shepherd cannot do is to control the minds of his sheep, to take away their animal instinct to wander off, to leave the flock, get lost and put themselves at risk from predators and the harsh elements of nature.

In the story of the “Lost Sheep” from another gospel, the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 15, Jesus tells of the shepherd who had 100 sheep and loses one of them. What does the shepherd do? He leaves the 99 and goes after the lost sheep until he finds her. And when he finds her, he joyfully puts her on his shoulders and goes home to celebrate with his friends and neighbours and asks them to rejoice with him because he found the lost sheep.

As good as that shepherd is at trying to keep all his herd together, he cannot control the animal instinct to wander off, to get lost and risk its life.

And so, it is with us. God decided not to control our minds. He gave us the gift of “Free Will”, and we have the choice to shape our lives the way we want it, either for the better or the worse.

Pr. Bobby Scobey, said:

“Your will enables you to choose. Choose wisely. He who marries the spirit of the age, the spirit of the world will soon find himself a widower.

God asks no one whether he will accept life. This is not the choice. The only choice you have as you go through life is how you will live it.

One's philosophy is not best expressed in words; it is expressed in the choices one makes. . . . In the long run, we shape our lives and we shape ourselves.

Our destiny is not determined for us, but it is determined by us. Man's free will is part of God's sovereign will. We have freedom to take which course we choose, but not freedom to determine the end of that choice."

The story of the lost sheep in Jesus' parable was not going to have a good ending. Her choice of leaving the flock was going to have grave consequences; she was going to be vulnerable to wild predators, was going to lose all the security, care and love her shepherd gave her and the entire fold: food, shelter, protection, healing, guidance.

The sheep's choice was not a wise choice, but it was her choice and there is nothing abnormal about it. The gift of free will belonged to her as it belongs to us.

Sometimes we exercise that gift wisely and sometimes we don't. We can't always expect a wise choice from ourselves; it seems that it is our instinct to wander off, get lost, and sometimes those bad choices cost us a lot.

What is remarkable in the parable is the response from the shepherd: he goes after the lost sheep and leaves the 99 behind.

First, he noticed that one sheep left the flock and doesn't know where she went, so he goes out to find her, perhaps making himself vulnerable to the attacks of predators. When he finds her, he doesn't take any harsh measures against the poor lost sheep. He doesn't lock her up in a sheep pen or stable.

He doesn't scold the sheep for wandering off and for not trying to find her way back to the flock. Instead, he rejoices, puts her on his shoulders and invites his friends and neighbours to celebrate with him.

This is what a Good Shepherd does; he knows his flock, and when one goes astray, wanders off or gets lost, he goes after her. The Good Shepherd risks and is willing to lay down his own life for his sheep, and that is exactly what he did.

This Good Shepherd came to us looking for the lost flock, the lost humanity, and he found us all on the worst possible place, the cross. It was on the cross where we were found: the Good Shepherd laid down his life for us, so that no one could be lost. The Good News doesn't end there. This Good Shepherd keeps finding us, watching over us, helping us to go back to his flock.

We recognize his voice, because his voice is the voice of the cross, his voice is the voice of sacrificial love, salvation and forgiveness. He is calling us, looking for us as we misuse the gift of "Free Will", the gift of "Free Choice".

The Shepherd in Psalm 23 is the same Shepherd we find in our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is our comfort, he is our guide, he is our peace and our hope and keeper of our life in this world and in the next.

He is our Bread of Life, He is our Living water, He is the vine, the branch, the gate and the way, the truth and the life, He is the Sacrificial Lamb and at the same time the Good Shepherd. He is all this and much more for us.

Jesus can be anything and everything, so that you and I can be safe, cared, loved, and have abundant life.

To know Jesus this way, to know His voice, to know His shepherding works is indeed one of the greatest blessings you and I can have, especially because we live in a world of many voices that try to confuse us and try to pull us away from the Good Shepherd.

Those are dangerous voices: voices that instead of bringing comfort will bring despair, voices that won't take you to still waters but to turbulent and troubled waters, voices that will teach and encourage you to be untruthful, to hate and not to love.

Those are voices that will make you believe in divisions and not in unity, believe in the powers of this world and not in the powers from on high, voices that will teach you to put your trust in the flesh and not in the Spirit, voices that will try to make you believe in death and not in life.

What the Good Shepherd does is to give us life, abundant life at the high cost of his very own life, for which we are very thankful and blessed for ever and ever. **Amen.**