

**May 11, 2014**  
**Easter 4**  
**Shepherd Sunday/Mother's Day**

*"The Shepherd's Love for Struggling Sheep"*

**1 PETER 2:19-25**

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**F**or it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. <sup>20</sup> But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. <sup>21</sup> To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. <sup>22</sup> "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." <sup>23</sup> When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. <sup>24</sup> He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. <sup>25</sup> For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

It happened this past week in North Dakota. Three year old Carson was playing on the family farm when his parents Courtney and Brock Urness lost track of him. Neighbors were called in to help with the search that went on for hours into the night. It was cold and rain was falling. The parents also noticed that their dog Cooper was missing. They hoped he was with Carson and protecting him. About 2:00 AM in the morning someone caught a glimpse of Cooper lying down in the grass with Carson underneath him. Little Carson told his mom "I was afraid but Cooper kept me warm." Today will be a special Mother' Day for this young family.

Think of how often you have been rescued in your life by Jesus your loving Shepherd. You wandered down some path of sin and your Shepherd came to rescue you. You found yourself in some rough patch of life and your Shepherd was there with his rod and staff to comfort you. When you found yourself eating the dirty brown dusty grass of this life, the Shepherd took you up to the mountain meadows to green pastures and quiet cool waters where he restored your soul. How comforting the words are that we just read to you, "For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."

Peter is writing this letter to Christians who are have been forced to carry a heavy cross for Jesus. Some of them have been driven from their homes because of their love for Jesus their Shepherd, yet they are still under the care of the Shepherd. The 23rd Psalm says "Goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our life." That's a good place to be even when we go through this dark valleys.

**Sheep have struggles**

If you are sheep that want to follow Jesus closely then you can expect a certain amount of extra pain and suffering to come your way. Peter writes, "For it is commendable if a man

bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God." In the verse before this Peter wrote, "Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate but also to those who are harsh." It has been estimated that one third of the Roman Empire was made up of people who were slaves. When slaves became Christians they reflected their love for Jesus in the way they obeyed and served their masters.

Imagine for a moment how hard it must have been for slaves who became Christians to live with masters who hated and despised the Christian faith. Instead of receiving ten lashes from the whip they might receive twenty just because they believed in Jesus. Peter writes, "But how it is to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God." The word translated as "commendable" can also be translated as "grace" or "being gracious." The Christian slave who is beaten unfairly has the opportunity to show God's grace and love for a bad master just as Jesus prayed for his enemies as he was being nailed to the cross. I wonder how many people were led to Jesus by these slaves who reflected Jesus' love as they were treated unfairly. Later in this letter Peter writes, "But in your hearts set apart Jesus as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give you for the hope you have."

It is hard to imagine that we had a time in our country when people owned slaves. Pity the poor people in African who were taken from their homes and villages, packed like sardines into the holds of ships and then sold on the market to the highest bidder. Some of these slaves bore multiple scars on their bodies from masters who treated them unjustly. Women had to give themselves to their masters or undergo a beating. In all of that darkness and ugliness, slaves came to know about Jesus their Shepherd who gave his life for the sheep. We still sing their songs today such as "Nobody knows the trouble I've seen. Nobody knows but Jesus." They sang about a better life to come in the future with words such as "Swing low sweet chariot..." Jesus gave them strength to endure the injustices placed on them and even rise above them.

Today we think of the young Christian women in northern Nigeria who were taken from their homes and school by ruthless Islamic terrorists. How frightened they must be as they are sold as slaves because of their Christian faith. Please remember them in your prayers. Pray for the arms of our loving Shepherd Jesus to hold them tight and protect them from this valley of the shadow of death. Isaiah 40 says, "He tends his flock like a shepherd; he gathers the lambs in his arms carries them close to his heart."

I once saw a bumper sticker that said, "Religion is for followers." That was not intended to be a compliment. We live in world where people do not respect those who follow Jesus. They do not understand or appreciate what Jesus said in John 10, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand." When we listen to the voice of Jesus our Shepherd we want to follow him wherever that path may lead. Did you know that out of the 318 people involved in writing the Nicene Creed that we confess on communion Sundays, over 300 them had an eye gouged out, hand cut off, or their legs beaten and maimed because of the bold confession of the Christian faith? Jesus never said, "Take up your lounge chair and follow me? He said, "Take up your cross and follow me."

When I was working on this sermon it came across the news that two twin brothers who have a popular television program about flipping homes in the real estate market had their show canceled. It appears that they mentioned they believe marriage should be between a man and woman and not two men or two women. Young people bear a cross for Jesus when they refrain from following the path that leads them away from Jesus.

How do you handle being treated unfairly for the name of Jesus? You gather together with other Christians and remind each other that the love you have in Jesus is so far superior to any struggles or challenges that life may bring your way.

### **Sheep have the Shepherd's love**

What love we see in Jesus. "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his footsteps." Jesus suffered for us. We see the wounds on the backs of slaves that were beaten. Then we look at the wounds on the back of Jesus as he was "wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities." Jesus kept these wounds on his hands when he rose from the dead to provide us with assurance that his suffering for our sin was real, not just some illusion or story that was being passed around. Jesus gives us an example to follow and also the strength to follow that example. As Augustine said, "Lord ask what you want and then give me what you ask."

What love we see in Jesus. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." The word for deceit has the thought of catching a fish with bait. There was nothing false in Jesus, nothing to deceive or hide or pretend. He was the real deal in everything he did and said. Sheep love to wander. They also like to cover up their sin and pretend they are not as bad off as they appear to be. Did you ever try to hide something from your mother? The foolish games we played as children continue into adulthood. They never go away as we try to make ourselves look better than we are. There was no deceit in Jesus. His perfect life and perfect death are the only hope we have for our sin to be forgiven.

What love we see in Jesus our Shepherd. "When they hurled insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead he entrusted himself to him who judges justly." When you have a spouse who doesn't show love to you, or a boss that is harsh with you, or people who take advantage of you, or a government that is not honest with you, you get angry. You want to lash out and retaliate. Give them a piece of your mind. Jesus did not do that. Our Shepherd made no threats. He did not use his power as God to blister the lips of people who mocked him and ridiculed him. For all those times I have hurt people because they hurt me, my only hope of forgiveness is the perfect life Jesus lived and his perfect suffering for my sin.

What love we see in Jesus our Shepherd. "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we die to sin and live for righteousness, by his wounds you have been healed." Jesus said, "I am the Good Shepherd, I give my life for the sheep." Jesus kept the nail prints in his hands after he rose from the dead. When he ascended up into heaven he lifted his hands in blessing. The disciples saw those nail prints one more time.

When I was a child, we would often be one of the last to come into church for worship.

That meant walking up to the front of the church to find a seat because usually the back of the church filled up first. There was a blessing to sitting in the front. The altar area of the church had a statute of Jesus ascending up into heaven. I recall looking at the statue and seeing the nail marks in the hands of Jesus and thinking of how much he loved me. I knew my mother loved me and cared for me, but Jesus loved me more. Those wounds in the hands of Jesus were the supreme evidence of Jesus' love. They are also the supreme evidence that the perfect payment was made at the cross. We are not ashamed of these wounds. Colossians says of our heavenly Father, "But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight without blemish and free from accusation."

What love we see in Jesus our Shepherd. "For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." Little Carson wandered off. He could not find his way home. He had to be rescued. Jesus found you when you were lost. He holds in his loving arms and promises that nothing in all creation will ever separate you from his love. We love our mothers for all the love they have shown us, but we love Jesus our Shepherd even more. He has helped us with so many hard struggles in the past and he will be there for us in the future. Amen.