

**Living on the Resurrection Side of Life:
“Resurrected Following”**

John 10:1-10

Dr. J. Howard Olds

April 13, 2008

A famous actor was the guest of honor at a social gathering. As people gathered around, they asked the actor to recite excerpts from various literary works. He obliged and did so brilliantly. Finally, an elderly pastor asked the author to recite the 23rd Psalm. The actor hesitated at first and then agreed on one condition. The pastor would return the favor. The actor's recitation was brilliant and eloquent. People responded to the actor with lengthy applause. The pastor's rendition was feeble and frail. But when the pastor finished, there was not a dry eye in the house. Finally, the actor broke the silence with these words: "I know the psalm. The pastor knows the Shepherd."

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." Do you know the Shepherd? Have you found Him to be good? Have you discovered He is all you need?

FOLLOW THE GOOD SHEPHERD WHO KNOWS HIS OWN BY NAME.

The sweetest sound to any ear is the sound of your own name. It is the hunger of the human heart to know and to be known, to be recognized, to be called by name.

I must confess that I have done a poor job of calling people by name through the years. I can recognize a face much easier than I can call a name. Sometimes I know the name but cannot speak it in the moment. It is most embarrassing in my business.

Most people seem to understand even if they feel disappointed. Most excuse me by explaining to themselves that I have 6,800 members. A few people are downright indignant. "Do you remember me?" they ask. And as I stumble for an answer they insist, "Tell me my name." Finally, I have found an answer to that intimidation. I say, "Honey, if you don't know your own name, let's see if we can get you some help." It gets some laughter even if it doesn't relieve the disappointment.

The Good Shepherd knows your name. You are the beloved. Listen to that inner voice which says, *"I have called you by name, from the very beginning. You are mine and I am yours. You are my beloved; on you my favor rests. I have molded you in the depths of the earth and knitted you together in your mother's womb. I have carved you in the palms of my hands and hidden you in the shadow of my embrace. I have counted every hair on your head and guided you at every step. Wherever you go, I will go."*

Farmers in our day raise sheep to be slaughtered for food. Shepherds in Jesus' day raised sheep for wool to make clothing. They had small flocks. Each sheep had a name: Brown Leg, Black Ear, Spot, Straggler. The shepherd called each one by name. *"The Lord is my shepherd."* He knows my name.

FOLLOW THE GOOD SHEPHERD. HE CARES FOR HIS OWN.

Does Jesus care when I've tried and failed
To resist some temptation strong;
When for my deep grief, there is no relief
Though my tears flow all the night long?
O yes, He cares, I know he cares,
His heart is touched with my grief.
When the days are weary, the long nights dreary,
I know my Savior cares.

When do we receive real comfort and consolation? Is it when someone teaches us how to think or act? Is it when we receive advice about where to go and what to do? Is it when we hear words of reassurance and hope? Perhaps; sometimes. But, what really counts is that in moments of pain and suffering, someone stays with us. More important than any particular action, or word, or advice is the simple presence of someone who cares.

When our oldest son was 25 years-old, he underwent open heart surgery to replace the aortic valve. As we gathered around his bed before surgery, we reminded him of our love and presence and the fact that we would be waiting for him when he returned. Then I leaned in to his bed, took him in my arms and said, "Wes, I wish I could do this for you!" With frightened, tearful eyes, he replied, "I wish you could too."

The good news of the Christian Gospel is that the Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. When Jesus saw the crowd harassed and dejected like sheep without a shepherd, he had compassion on them.

How is it, that great hymn of the Early Church put it?
"Christ Jesus, who being in the very nature of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. . . he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross."

The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. He is prepared to die that his sheep can live. The Lord is my Shepherd, What else could I want?

FOLLOW THE SHEPHERD WHO PROTECTS HIS SHEEP.

Hired hands are not like good shepherds. When the hired hand sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. The man runs away because he cares nothing for the sheep.

To say that the Lord is my Shepherd, is to say that we live in an unpredictable, often terrifying world, ever mindful of all the bad things that might happen to us and all the people around us. But despite it all, we can get up every morning to face that world because we know that there's someone in that world who cares about us and tries to keep us safe. To philosophers and theologians, God may be the First Cause, or the Unmoved Mover. But to people like us, what is most important about God is that he is the presence that makes the world less frightening.

Sheep are rather helpless animals. They have few ways to fight. So, the good shepherd fights on their behalf. He has a rod, a heavy, hard club 2-3 feet long with nails in the end of it. That billy club is a tool of defense against the wild animals that attack the flock. Like David was armed with his sling shot, the shepherd is armed with his rod.

He has a staff. A staff is an 8 ft. long pole with a crook on the end of it. Sheep must not only be protected from the wild animals, but from the landscape itself. The hills of Palestine are steep and rugged. Sheep are prone to wander. The staff nudges them back to the flock and rescues them from the rugged ravine.

Insurance is something you carry hoping you never have to use it. The facts are, you probably will. You hope your insurance company is there when you are, ready to help, ready to assist, ready to pull you out of some unwanted predicament.

Better still, we have a God who is able to do exceedingly, abundantly, above all that we can ask or think. We have a God who is able to deliver us from the fiery furnace. We have a God who is able to keep us safe in the fold of his everlasting care. We have a God who is the Good Shepherd.

FOLLOW THE GOOD SHEPHERD WHO PROVIDES FOR HIS OWN.

Great is thy faithfulness, O God, my Father;
There is no shadow of turning with thee;
All I have needed thy hand hath provided;
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.

God made provision for our need long before we had a need. Before we felt cold, he stored up for us gas, oil, and coal in the earth to keep us warm. He knew we would be hungry, so he made the fields fertile and the fruit tasty so that all could eat. He knew that we would be lonely, so he created communities and called us together in churches.

Your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask. If He provides for the birds of the air and the flowers of the field, will He not also provide for you, o ye, of little faith?

The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.

The Lord is my Shepherd, he's all I need.

The Lord is my Shepherd, I'm confident he will lead me home.