

Easter 4 – April 21, 2024  
Text: John 10:11-18  
Theme: "Following by His Power"

**There is a vast difference between being a shepherd and being a hired hand. First the shepherd hears the voice of the owner of the sheep and does what is commanded even if it is personally costly to him. He cares for the sheep the way the owner cares for the sheep. The hired hand does what is most beneficial for the hired hand. It reminds me of something a business owner told me. The owner of the business needed to promote an employee, but which one? The owner sat in the lobby where he had thrown a greasy scrap of his salami sandwich on the floor. He observed as three employees walked past and stepped over the mess. Finally, one employee stopped and picked it up, got a wet napkin and wiped the floor and threw it all away. That was the employee who got the promotion. The owner wanted to see who cared about his business like he cared about his business. The shepherd cares about the sheep the way the owner cares about the sheep.**

**Second, the shepherd leads where the owner says regardless of whether or not it seems beneficial or practical to him. The hired hand is astute to the ways of the world and leads in a way that is most successful from a worldly point of view. He cares about making a buck, and looking successful. He cares little about the path that**

**the owner has laid out if he thinks he knows better than the owner. The shepherd leads where the owner says to go.**

**Third, the shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He will face whatever wolves need to be faced because he has confidence that the owner is watching out for him and supporting him. And he hears the owner's voice which strengthens him. The hired hand turns tale and runs like the wind. He's not about to face a wolf for someone else's sheep. He cares about his own skin far more than he cares about the sheep or the owner for that matter. The shepherd will face the wolves for the good of the sheep.**

**It's hard being a shepherd in an egalitarian society where everyone is the king of his own kingdom. If the shepherd says something the sheep don't like, they just go to a different sheep pen and sadly there are other shepherds who will welcome them in without question. And heaven forbid that the shepherd should tell a sheep how to live because who is he to tell me anything? But in God's sheep pen, he has called shepherds to be the voice of the owner, the Good Shepherd. He has called shepherds for our benefit. And if the shepherd is faithful to the Word of God, the Word empowers him to lead the sheep well.**

**The hardest part of being a shepherd is trusting the Word of the owner; the Good Shepherd. We have so many ideas that are not**

**in the Word and we are so tempted to go with our ideas instead of the Good Shepherd's. We fall into modernistic traps of the devil, like believing that the number of sheep we have really matters. We get lulled into a false sense of security and laziness when everything in our fold is going well as though there is not work to do in the world around us. If the shepherd does not stay connected to the Word of the Good Shepherd, he becomes lazy and sloppy. It is a profound danger for every shepherd.**

**That's why sheep and shepherds have to work together. The sheep have to make sure that the shepherd has time to study God's Word and isn't always in some visioning meeting or financial seminar. They have to make sure that the pen is clean and well maintained so that other sheep will come. They have to carry the shepherd's message into the world, starting with their own families so that there will always be new sheep taking the place of the sheep who die.**

**The shepherd has to put worldly ideas aside and focus on God's Word first and foremost for if he is not filled with the Word, he really has nothing to offer the sheep that they cannot get from a self-help book. The shepherd has to remember that the sheep are completely competent to run the fold and don't need him taking time away from what he needs to do to micromanage what God has called them to**

**do. He also has to concentrate on showing love and care for *all* the sheep, not just the convenient ones or the ones that somehow benefit him.**

**If both sheep and shepherd rely on the Word of the Good Shepherd, it works. It's not to say that there are no challenges. And there is always much need for forgiveness and the overlooking of weaknesses. But with the Good Shepherd guiding the Church, it works every time. The shepherd and the people are quite literally a marriage made in heaven. God calls a particular shepherd to a particular people and intends for them to work together like a marriage. Like any marriage, it requires work on both sides: work on communication, work on forgiveness for failures and foibles, work on growing together like the branches of the vine that we are.**

**Many churches today want the power to hire and fire their shepherds which the LCMS prohibits. It sounds like a good idea. If I can hire and fire my employees, my doctors, my plumbers, and electricians, why can't I hire and fire my pastor? But what God knows is that we don't want a hired hand. Jesus said in the Gospel for today,**

**"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. He flees because he is a**

**hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.” A hired hand cares nothing for the sheep. The shepherd, called by the Good Shepherd cares for his master’s sheep because they are his master’s sheep. Like the Good Shepherd, he is willing to sacrifice for the sheep and do whatever he can to help, lead, feed and strengthen the sheep. That’s what a shepherd does when he is in the service of the Good Shepherd.**

**When the marriage works well and both sheep and shepherd are striving together, the Church soars high above the world. That is where Trinity is right now. Our marriage is working well. We are both striving together and you can feel the lift off as it is happening. God has made us a powerful team and, as we continue to grow and strengthen through the Word and Sacraments, I look forward to the amazing heights we will reach as the Good Shepherd continues to lead us through this valley to the Promised Land.**