



FROM THE PULPIT

North Shore Congregational Church

“The Model Shepherd”

Rev. Dr. Martin W. Hall – Preaching

John 10: 11-18; I John 3: 16-24

April 22, 2018

This passage from the tenth chapter of John, one of those ‘I am’ sayings of Jesus, is nothing new to me, or to many in this church. I’ve preached on it many times before, including here. I’ve had explorations into the prospect of Jesus laying his life down for us, into the whole notion of being a shepherd, into our role as the sheep, and I’ve even dug into this notion of being the ‘good shepherd’ vs. the hired hand. As the hired hand doesn’t care for the sheep, or have a real notable interest in the sheep, he will preserve himself over the sheep – as opposed to Jesus, of course, who knows us, who loves us, who lays down his life for us. There is so much in this brief passage, and for many of us, it is one we’ve tackled more than once before.

In all of those previous engagements, however, in all of my previous explorations, I never came across the perspective that I encountered this week. As I was reading an exegetical commentary on the passage, the author spent time digging into the word that, in many of our translations, reads as ‘good.’ “I am the ‘good’ shepherd.” Jesus says. What the author drew attention to, however, is that good, for us, is the opposite of bad. Good, in the case of this passage, however, stems from the Greek work ‘Kalos.’ And, Kalos, while accurate in it’s sense of being ‘good,’ is good in a different way. It’s not good as in the opposite of bad, nearly as much as it is good as in the ideal, the exemplar, the model of what should be. That perspective, that understanding of the word being translated here, forever changed the meaning of this passage for me. Because there is something entirely different in Jesus proclaiming himself as the model shepherd, instead of just the good one.

As I look at the baptism that we share this morning with Molly, Jessica, Matt, and all of the family, I am drawn to consider my own ever-evolving journey of being a parent. And, the truth is, that one of the greatest lessons I’ve learned in parenting is that who and what your children become has often so little to do with what you say, what you proclaim, or what you teach – and everything to do with what you do, and who you are. As children grow, it doesn’t take long to see yourself in them. As a parent you talk, and you teach, and you explain, and you lecture, and you go on and on with all of those things you want your children to understand, but what you find more and more is that who they are is far more shaped by who and what they’ve seen in you, than anything they’ve ever heard from you. The good and bad, the beautiful and the ugly, our

children are a reflection of us – and a day doesn't go by in which I am not reminded of both the positive and the not so positive ways in which they have learned not by word, but by the model of who I am.

And, that's the new power this passage claimed in me this week. "I am the model shepherd," is really what Jesus is saying here. And, what is the purpose of a model if not to be that which other people are supposed to follow. Jesus isn't making a proclamation, here, about what he has done for us. He isn't speaking, here, about good and bad shepherds. And, he isn't even solely pointing at his love for us. Jesus is saying that he is the model shepherd – that his love for us is the example of what it means to love.

As we move from the Gospel to the first letter of John, we hear the same message reflected in a different way, "We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. 17 How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? 18 Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action." (I John 3: 16-18)

There is power, promise, and great hope that comes from Jesus' proclamation that he is the good shepherd. There is power, promise, and great hope that comes from understanding that Jesus is the one whose love for us was so great that he would lay down his life for us. There is also great responsibility, however, that comes from Jesus' proclamation that he is the model shepherd. There is great responsibility that comes from understanding that, in addition to being the one whose love for us is so great that he laid down his life for us, that very sacrificial love is not just the blessing for us to receive, but the model for us to follow.

The litany of ways in which this might, could, and should play out in our lives is endless – and far more than I could ever try to recount in any Sunday message (much less one that is a bit abbreviated due to all that we are experiencing in our worship today). But, from how we spend our time, to how we use our resources, to how we treat those who are unlike us, to how we stand up for those who are 'the least of these,' to a thousand other corners of our lives – we have been given a model for love that is not about who makes us feel good, who lives up to our standards, who is worth our time, what is convenient, what is simple or any of a hundred other metrics and filters we tend (both intentionally and subconsciously) to put in place. From how we spend our time, to how we use our resources, to how we treat those who are unlike us, to how we stand up for those who are 'the least of these,' to a thousand other corners of our lives – we have been told that our love of others is to be guided by the love of Christ himself, the model shepherd, who laid down his life for us!

There is power, promise, and great hope that comes from understanding that Jesus is the one whose love for us was so great that he would lay down his life for us. There is also great responsibility, however, that comes from understanding that he was not just the good shepherd, but the model, the model of selfless and sacrificial love that we ought to live out in every day of our lives.