*DAILY DEVOTIONAL*

August 29 – September 3

“The Lost Sheep”

**Monday, August 29 Luke 15:1-7**

*“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and looses one of them”*

God is committed to finding the lost, as the parables of this chapter explains. Jesus deals with the contrast between this divine attitude and the temptation among many believers to ignore the lost. Jesus once again chooses the scribes and Pharisees as the foil for his comparison. They cannot believe that he is spending so much time receiving sinners and eating with them. Such table fellowship represents an absence of the separation they think righteousness demands. Jesus argues, however, that the call of God demands time be spent seeking the lost.

Jesus’ story fits the agrarian and pastoral setting of Palestine. A shepherd counting a hundred sheep comes up one short, so he goes to look for the lost animal. We are not told if he leaves the rest of his flock with neighbors, though that is likely in the natural understanding of the situation, for he would hardly put the ninety-nine at risk for one sheep. The search is successful when he finds the lost animal, not shred to bits by some wild animal, but alive and well. The shepherd rejoices with his friends and neighbors at finding his lost sheep.

*I rejoice with you, Lord, when one who has been lost is found. Amen.*

**Tuesday, August 30 Psalm 23:1-6**

*“The Lord is my shepherd”*

In the ancient world, kings were known as shepherds of their people. Thus to profess “The Lord is my shepherd” is to declare one’s loyalty to God and intention to live under God’s reign. It was the responsibility of kings to provide for and protect the people, but they frequently failed to do so. In contrast to the failure of earthly kings, God does what a shepherd is supposed to do: provide life and security for the people. Thus the psalmist affirms, “I have everything I need.”

Contrary to the usual understanding, the imagery in verses 2 and 3 is not aimed primarily at communicating a sense of peace and tranquility. It does this, to be sure, but its primary intent is to say that God keeps the psalmist alive. For a sheep, to be able to “lie down in green pastures” means to have food; to be led “beside quiet waters” means to have something to drink; to be led “in right paths” means that danger is avoided and proper shelter is attained. In short, “God restores my soul,” means “God keeps me alive.” The sheep lack nothing, because the shepherd provides the basic necessities of life – food, drink, and shelter.

*I stay close to you, Lord, for you provide everything I need. Amen.*

**Wednesday, August 31 Matthew 18:10-14**

*“Do not look down on one of these little ones”*

Jesus warns those who may try to take advantage of his disciples. The expression “little ones” here are disciples who have humbled themselves to be like powerless children and they, together with those who might take advantage of them, can be sure that the heavenly Father will watch out for their welfare through angels, who are in constant communication with him. Jesus then connects angelic care for the “little ones” with the parable of the sheep. The key is a concern for his humble followers who have gone astray through others’ causing them to sin or through their own sinful choices. The Father will expend every effort to bring about their safe return. The joy of finding the lost sheep does not mean that it has more value than the others. Rather, the shepherd’s joy demonstrates the depth of his concern, care, and love for all his sheep.

In the similar parable in Luke 15:3-7 the lost sheep represents an unsaved sinner, while here it implies a believer who has gone astray. Either way, the emphasis is on the love of God for all people and his unwillingness that any of us should be lost.

*I praise you, Lord, for bringing me back when I stray. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONAL*

August 29 – September 3

“The Lost Sheep”

**Thursday, September 1 John 10:1-10**

*“I am the gate for the sheep”*

In this teaching Jesus uses the imagery of shepherd and sheep, familiar symbols deeply imbedded in Hebrew life and history (Psalm 23; Psalm 78:52-53; Psalm 74:1; Isaiah 40:11; Jeremiah 23:1-4). This is not only a tender pastoral teaching, but a stinging indictment of those who profess to be shepherds but are actually thieves and robbers, strangers and hirelings.

Those who will not enter the sheepfold by the one door have not come to care for the sheep, but are thieves and robbers coming to divide and destroy. They attempt to bypass the doorkeeper, who would never allow them to enter, by climbing over the fence unnoticed. And there are strangers, masquerading as shepherds, disguising their voices, trying to come between the shepherd and his sheep. But the sheep flee, frightened by the unfamiliar voice. How different is the shepherd who enters the sheepfold with authority because he is a familiar figure to the doorkeeper. And the sheep are at ease with him because they know his voice when he calls them.

*Guard your church, Lord, against those who would destroy her. Amen.*

**Friday, September 2 John 10:11-21**

*“I am the good shepherd”*

Jesus identifies himself as the good shepherd. In so doing he lays hold of the rich meaning of God as Israel’s Shepherd, their Ruler, Protector, Leader, and caring Companion. Jesus is the good shepherd because he gives his life for the sheep. This is why he has come. He cares for the sheep daily, watching, feeding, and protecting them. But in the end he must finally deal with their greatest danger, face the mightiest thief, the evil one, who spreads darkness and disorder through his own servants, the false shepherds. So the good Shepherd will give his life at the cross in this last struggle with this enemy and overcome him, thus saving his sheep.

Jesus is also the good Shepherd who knows the sheep and they know him. There is a loving intimacy between Shepherd and sheep. The Shepherd knows the hurts and the needs of every sheep. And the sheep know and trust their Shepherd – every inflection of his voice, the way by which he leads them out to pasture, his courage in the face of danger. This intimate knowing between Shepherd and sheep is rooted in and modeled after the union between Father and Son.

*I praise you, Lord, for keeping me safe from the one who seeks to destroy me. Amen.*

**Saturday, September 3 John 10: 22-30**

*“You do not believe because you are not of my sheep”*

The religious leaders push in, surrounding Jesus as he is walking in the temple court, pressing him to answer their question of whether or not he is the Messiah. But Jesus can only be known as the Messiah by spiritual insight, not by verbal or human proofs. He cannot answer their question about whether he is the Messiah in the way the religious leaders want it answered. Over and over again he has urged them to let his works, which have been done in his Father’s name, bear witness to who he is. But they will not submit to that kind of evidence and so it is impossible for them to hear his voice and follow him. They are not his sheep.

Jesus’ sheep hear his voice and follow him. He shares his abundant and eternal life with them so they will never perish. And no enemy, however strong he may seem, can snatch any of the sheep from Jesus’ hand, because his Father, who has given them to the Good Shepherd, is greater than all enemies. The mighty sign of that holding power will be Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. To be kept in Jesus’ hand is to be held by the Father’s hand, for they are One.

*You have given me eternal life, Lord, and nothing can change that! Amen.*