

**Date: July 22, 2018**

**Scripture: Mark 6:30-34**

**Title: GOD WILL PUT YOU ON HIS SHOULDERS**

Some people are broken and they're not even certain how they got that way.

It reminds me of the Lutheran pastor who always started each service by saying "The Lord be with you."

The people would respond, "And also with you."

But, one Sunday the PA system wasn't working, so the first thing he said was "There's something wrong with this microphone."

The people responded, "And also with you."

You and I know the truth. There's something wrong with all of us.

In our lesson for today Mark tells us, "The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going, they didn't even have a chance to eat, he said to them, 'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.'

"So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things."

**Sheep without a shepherd, what a descriptive term.** That was Jesus' reaction to the multitude who were seeking him. "He had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd."

There's something sad and almost pathetic about human beings. For all of our pride, all of our knowledge, all of our sophistication, there are areas of our life in which we're so vulnerable, so uncertain, so insecure.

The heartache of loving and losing . . . fears and insecurities about the future . . . aging and dying . . . the inability to get our act together . . . doing those things we know in our hearts, we ought to do and leaving off those that are destructive to us . . . the difficulty in connecting our lives one to another.

I'm certain that God sees our condition and has compassion, because we remind Him of sheep without a shepherd.

**You see, sheep are particularly prone to wander.** The shepherd has to be watchful whenever his sheep are in treacherous terrain, because they will invariably wander off and some of them will get into serious trouble.

I read something recently that caught my attention. It was about the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Dead Sea Scrolls are a large collection of manuscripts . . . many of them copies of Old Testament books . . . which date back to the first century. Before these scrolls were discovered, the earliest Old Testament manuscripts could only be dated back to the 10th century. In Biblical scholarship terms, it was a significant find.

They were found in the mid 1930s by a shepherd boy who was looking for lost sheep in a valley near the Dead Sea. The valley wall had many caves and the boy was

throwing rocks into the caves to scare out any sheep that were hiding. When he threw a stone into a certain cave he heard a pot smash. On investigation he found hundreds of sealed pots with manuscripts, well preserved inside. They became known as the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Isn't that classic? A major archaeological find occurred because sheep are prone to wander off and get lost! Now, sheep aren't the only creatures of God that wander.

I read recently that, according to one reputable source, every day in America 2,300 people are reported missing! You heard it right: 2,300 people are reported missing in America every day.

"Some are displaced by hurricanes and others are abducted by a distraught parent. An old man, his mind long gone, simply walks away, and teenagers, tired of abuse and chaos at home, flee for what they suppose will be a fresh start. Some people fake their death, and others are taken with criminal intent. But some seem to just wander off, like sheep without a shepherd . . . perhaps looking for greener pastures. The interesting thing is, that many of these people have no interest in returning home.

God sees us as sheep without a shepherd. It saddens God, to see us flounder about with no sense of direction, no sense of purpose, no sense of hope. Sheep are prone to wander.

**Sheep are also quite fragile.** Sheep are naturally defenseless. They must be watched continually. They need protection at night. Predators continually try to infiltrate the flock to kill the sheep. Sheep are short sighted. They can only see 6 feet ahead.

One writer says, "No matter how many times you bring wayward sheep back, they are prone to wander off again, because they can't learn from their mistakes. That's important because sheep are defenseless and dependent. They don't have much of a bite . . . no natural defense, no claws, no horns, no fangs . . . not even a stink bag like a skunk. To make matters worse, they're top-heavy and their legs are spindly. This makes them slow. Plus they have no camouflage, so when they're being chased by a wolf, they're out of luck! Sheep are also susceptible to all kinds of diseases . . . they'll eat too much if you let them, and get sick. They're definitely not your king-of-the-forest types.

"And finally, sheep are easily frightened and confused. It doesn't take much to scramble the mind of a nervous sheep. They've even been known to plunge straight over the edge of a high cliff in a panic, one following right after another." Sheep are fragile and quite vulnerable, like many people.

We have heard much about sexual abuse over the past couple of years. If you watched the ESPY'S this past week, you saw and heard of the terrible sexual abuse our Olympic gymnastic girls endured for years. Sexual abuse is about those who prey upon the vulnerable, like wolves prey on sheep.

Laura Davis, who writes about sexual abuse, tells a story from her childhood. She recounts how at one time, when she was a child, there were many contractors around their house. There was one who tried to molest her. Fortunately for Laura, she told her mother. Her mother became furious. She went directly to the man and began hitting him with her broom. She ordered him from her house, and he was fired on the spot.

For Laura Davis, this was a defining moment (one which, sadly, a lot of victims don't have). Her mother's anger had been the means of her protection. She felt loved and safe. She felt important, because her mother had taken this kind of action.

In this case, Laura's mother was serving as a shepherd to her child. I wish every parent was that forceful when dealing with a predator. God is angry when anyone tries to harm one of His sheep in any way.

**That's why God sent Christ to be our shepherd.** Christ says in John 10:14, "I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep and they know me." The Creator-God, not only looks upon His children with compassion, but He has moved into the world to redeem those who are lost, to become the Shepherd of the sheep. Even more than that, He became the lamb, slain for the sins of the world.

In his book, *A Turtle on the Fencepost*, Allen C. Emery tells of the night he spent on the Texas plains with a shepherd who was keeping two thousand sheep. The shepherd prepared a bonfire for cooking supper and providing warmth. The sheep dogs lay down near the fire as the stars filled the sky.

Suddenly Emery heard the unmistakable wail of a coyote with an answering call from the other side of the range. The dogs weren't patrolling at the moment, and the coyotes seemed to know it. Rising quickly, the shepherd tossed some logs on the fire.

When Emery looked out at the sheep he saw thousands of little lights. Emery writes, "I realized that these were reflections of the fire in the eyes of the sheep. In the midst of danger, the sheep were not looking out into the darkness, but were keeping their eyes set toward the shepherd."

That's what you and I need to do. Keep our eyes set on the shepherd.

In John 10:27, Jesus said that his sheep hear him and follow him, and that he knows them. Those of us who live in the western world, don't have an accurate picture of what it means to be led like sheep. Western shepherds drive their sheep from behind the flock, often using dogs to bark at their heels. Eastern shepherds, like those in Bible times, lead their sheep from in front.

Author Neal Andersen, tells about watching a shepherd lead his flock on a hillside outside Bethlehem during a visit to the Holy Land. The shepherd sat on a rock while the sheep grazed. After a time he stood up, said a few words to the sheep, and walked away. The sheep followed him. It was fascinating! Andersen says the words of Jesus in John 10:27 suddenly took on new meaning: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."

So often in our modern world the noise of life muffles the Shepherd's voice. But still the shepherd calls. He knows each of us by name and he cares for us as if there was no one else on earth to care for.

Jesus told a parable in Luke 15 about a shepherd who has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. What does he do? He leaves the ninety-nine in the open country and goes after the lost sheep until he finds it. And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and heads toward home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, "Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep." Then Jesus says, "I tell you that in

the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”

What we need to see is, that Christ’s love is at the same time universal and highly individualized. The good shepherd loves all his sheep, while at the same time, he loves each individual sheep, as if it were the only sheep in the world to love.

The point is, that people often wander from the flock. But there’s One who is our Good Shepherd, always seeking to rescue us, and bring us back into the fold, if we will allow Him to.

Are you feeling a little lost today? Maybe you feel more than a little lost. The Good Shepherd is here today, seeking to help you find your way. He wants to put you on his shoulders, and take you once more to a safe place. Listen closely, and you’ll hear him call your name. Respond to that call by Trusting, Believing, and having an Active Faith in God making disciples of Jesus Christ in the transformation of the world. Amen.