

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

*The King of love my shepherd is; His goodness faileth never. I nothing lack when I am his; and he is mine forever.*

In many churches the altar window or a Sunday School room has a picture of Jesus either carrying a lamb in his arms or over his shoulders.

This picture is comforting.

It is a reminder that **even if we are the black sheep**

– the rogues and rascals who don't fit in or follow the rules

– **Jesus cares for us.**

It reminds us that **even if we become weak and tired in following,**  
Jesus cares for us.

It reminds us that **even if we are not singled out for special attention,**  
Jesus cares for us by leading us to green pastures and cool waters.

**What the picture does not show us is *why***

**Jesus holds the weak and vulnerable**

**and leads the strong.**

Jesus tells us himself – *I am the Good Shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep – I know my own and my own know me. I lay down my life for the sheep.*

Before we jump too quickly to the obvious, let's explore what it means for a shepherd to lay down his life.

Considering the Judean wilderness, I can easily imagine a shepherd chasing down a wolf or stray lamb and falling over a cliff.

And there are other dangers to shepherds.

If frightened, the herd may stampede and knock the shepherd over, trampling her..

If a ram is in the herd,

the shepherd could be mistaken for a competitor for the ewes' attention and be butted to death.

Rams can never be trusted, and shepherds learn never to turn their back to them.

The shepherd who goes to help an injured lamb may be hurt by its thrashing about or by its fearful mother.

There are many dangers in herding sheep – **and Jesus promises to accept all risk to care for the lives of his sheep.**

Notice that Jesus does not say he will care for the good sheep, as though somehow his care depends on them.

Jesus does not single out the weak or sick or injured to discard as worthless, but to heal them and restore them.

**Jesus, the Good Shepherd, lays down his life** – risks his own welfare – to protect and care for his sheep.

**Even to the point of suffering his own death.**

The hired hand looks out for #1 and flees at the first sign of danger, abandoning the sheep.

- For him, it is just a job – a paycheck – the sheep aren't his.
- If something happens to the sheep, he might lose his job, but can find another.
- The sheep are someone else's problem.

**Not so for Jesus, the Good Shepherd.**

**He is the owner of the sheep.**

They are his.

They follow him because they know his voice.

If something happens to even one of his sheep, **it is a great personal loss to him.**

In praying to his Father, Jesus the Good Shepherd says (John 17)

*Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. <sup>12</sup> While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled.*

So, who are these sheep who belong to Jesus?

To whom does the Good Shepherd extend his saving presence,  
his protective arm,  
his loving voice?

**To you, dear people – and to me.**

To all who hear his voice

and recognize it as the voice of the Good Shepherd  
who provides all we need,  
who gives us life,  
who refreshes our life,  
who calls us away from danger and leads us to safety.

It is Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who leads us to the still waters of  
Baptism,

whose voice speaks into our ears and hearts,

*“I claim you as my own.*

*I am saving you from the dangers of sin, death, and evil in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”*

**It is Jesus the Good Shepherd whose voice rings out from the pages of the Bible, calling us to hear and follow him.**

**It is Jesus the Good Shepherd who welcomes us into a flock – a community of followers who seek their life and salvation in him.**

Ours is not blind faith, as critics might say.

**Ours is faith that hears the voice of Jesus the Good Shepherd and trusts him to care for our lives.**

And why do we trust him?

**Because we have been in danger and been rescued from it.**

Because we have gone astray in our sins and found Jesus to be faithful in seeking and finding us.

Because we have cried out for nourishment

and discovered in bread and wine

**that Jesus himself provides the very life he promised to lay down for us.**

Our is not blind faith, but **tried and tested faith.**

Faith that has hoped in Christ and not been disappointed.

There are many other voices that call out to us

– hired hands,

false shepherds,

those who want to exploit us for what we can produce.

But as smooth as they may talk, they do not care about our lives.

**Jesus the Good Shepherd alone seeks our life above his own.**

Jesus alone laid down his life on the cross so that our sins would not endanger us.

And then –by the authority of God the Father – he took it up again so that his shepherding might continue.

The twist to this story is that by rising from the dead,

**Jesus the Good Shepherd transferred his shepherding authority to sheep.**

To Peter, the lead apostle, Jesus said “*If you love me, Feed my sheep*”.

And with what food did Peter feed them?

- With the message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ.
- With the call to live together in unity and share all things in common.
  
- With the preaching of the Word of God which is the voice of the Good Shepherd.

Jesus has given us the authority and opportunity  
to share with others the benefits of being in Jesus' flock  
and who the Good Shepherd is.

We are flock that follows Jesus the Good Shepherd and is called by him  
to keep one another with the herd  
and to lead others to follow him.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!