

**Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church**  
**Reverend Dr. Daris Bultena**

**April 25, 2010**

**4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter/Good Shepherd Sunday**

Psalm 23:1-6

<sup>1</sup>The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.  
<sup>2</sup>He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
he leads me beside still waters;  
<sup>3</sup>he restores my soul.  
He leads me in right paths  
for his name's sake.  
<sup>4</sup>Even though I walk through the darkest valley,  
I fear no evil;  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff-  
they comfort me.  
<sup>5</sup>You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies;  
you anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.  
<sup>6</sup>Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD  
my whole life long.

John 10:22-30

<sup>22</sup>At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, <sup>23</sup>and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. <sup>24</sup>So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." <sup>25</sup>Jesus answered, "I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; <sup>26</sup>but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. <sup>27</sup>My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup>I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup>What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. <sup>30</sup>The Father and I are one."

**“The ‘Ridiculously Amazing’ Good Shepherd”**

## Segment One – Part One

It was during the festival of the Dedication and Jesus is walking along in the temple. He is walking along in the portico of Solomon when the conversation takes place. Now this is the Gospel of John so there is always more going on that is plain to a quick read of the text.

We are more familiar with the festival of Dedication by its other name—it is Hanukkah. “Hanukkah,” which means dedication, is that great festival of light and joy. It is a celebration of a victorious nature—light and joy are the mood of the celebration.

There is great irony here—it is the Gospel of John, after all—that right in this great festival that is a celebration of light this conversation happens with the one who is the *Light of the World*. Here they are with the true light and they miss it.

They have this downer conversation and approach with Jesus. They are to be celebrating and joyous, but instead they are challenging and almost cantankerous. The *Light of the World* is right there with them and they cannot perceive it. Ironic.

## Segment Two – Part One

I am blessed! Amen. I am blessed! I know that and I praise God. Halleluiah Church! We are blessed. Every single day I am witnessing the blessing of God.

The other day I arrived at home and I had received a card in the mail. The card was from my niece Kealey in South Dakota. I did not expect to receive a card from her. It was not my birthday. I had not been card sick. I had not sent anything that called for a thank you note.

This was an out of the blue card. It was a surprise. It was a “for no reason” card. Inside the card she expressed gratitude for my being in her

life. She referred to me as a “ridiculously amazing” person. Wow—to have someone feel that and say it... I am blessed.

I think she is “ridiculously amazing!” Oh church, I am blessed!

### **Segment Three – Part One**

This is the Sunday in which the Church celebrates Good Shepherd Sunday. Every 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Easter the Gospel lesson comes from this chapter of John. “I am the Good Shepherd,” it says in John 10:11.

When Jesus has the interaction there in the Portico of Solomon, he comes back to the reference of sheep and the shepherd. He tells them that they do not understand because they are unable to hear his voice. His sheep hear his voice and follow him.

There is something about this whole thing with sheep and shepherd. It is a dominant theme in Scripture. “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” And then in Ezekiel 34 there is that vision of the wicked shepherds. Here in John, as a centerpiece of his theology, is this proclamation of Jesus as the Good Shepherd.

There is something to this whole sheep and shepherd thing.

### **Segment Four – Part One**

There is a story called “The Explorer” that is told by a Jesuit priest named Anthony DeMello. As the story goes there is this man who leaves home and travels far and away to the Amazon. When he returns home the people of his hometown are fascinated by the stories that he tells about the Amazon.

They hang on every word and long for him to keep telling them about every detail. The incredible waterfalls, the mountain vistas, and the

stunning displays of nature lure them in excitement as he recounts his time there.

As he talks about the forest and what it was like the people are just drawn in and very interested. So he takes out paper and pen and begins to draw a map that shows his travels and where each separate vista and view had been.

He tells them that they just must go in order to experience all that the Amazon has to offer.

The townspeople are just thrilled to have this map that he has drawn. They are so thrilled about it that they rush out and make copies of the map so that everyone has one. They frame their copies of the map and they hang them on their walls. They become experts on the Amazon and can, with their maps, point out every waterfall and rapids that is known.

### Segment One – Part Two

Ironic? Or perhaps, sad? Sad seems a better description. The *Light of the Word* and they miss it. The festival of joy and they are cantankerous. That word cantankerous is a great old word. Crabby, argumentative, and difficult are synonyms. Here is this celebration of light and they do not perceive the light that is right there with them.

But the sad part is this is not an ancient story. This is our story. We are the cantankerous ones—crabby, argumentative, and even difficult—it might not fit us all the time but it is an apt description plenty of the time.

Is it ironic? Do we get it that we have the *Light of the World* with us—alive, resurrected. This is the season of victory. We sing it every Sunday morning this season: “This is the feast of victory for our God. Alleluia. Alleluia.”

**But most of moment we do not live the Alleluia. We have the *Light of the World*. We need to live in the light. We need to live in the Alleluia.**

### **Segment Two – Part Two**

**“Ridiculously Amazing.” Who in your life is ridiculously amazing? Who? Just pause and thank God for a moment. We are blessed! We are blessed Church!**

**Now realize what is behind that “ridiculously amazing” status—it is love. It all comes back to love. It is what it is all about. It is what it has always been about.**

**And this is real truth—the extent that we can love, and feel love, and recognize it, and appreciate it too is just a tiny speck of the extent to which this God loves us. This God loves us beyond words. This God of ours loves us beyond measure.**

**This God of ours is filled with this ridiculously amazing love for us. Receive that. Receive it today Church as a holy blessing. “Ridiculously amazing” love from a “ridiculously amazing” God all for you and for me—all that love is on us. Hallelujah Church!**

### **Segment Three – Part Three**

**Much can be said about the reference to sheep and shepherd in this text. And much has been said. But I cannot help but think about sheep from the perspective of the role of the shepherd.**

**There are many animals in nature that by nature of their being they can camouflage themselves. Sheep cannot. Not in any way, not in any shape, not in any form. They have no ability to protect themselves. They are completely and totally dependent upon the shepherd.**

**Sheep are vulnerable. They need that shepherd. On their own they are vulnerable.**

**See, that is us. We are those sheep who need the shepherd. We think we can go it on our own. We think we are alone. No. Not the case. This “Ridiculously Amazing” Good Shepherd God is there holding us, guiding us, helping us. This incredible, indescribable God is swooping us up and is our protection in this world.**

**That Good Shepherd God holds us in his hand.**

#### **Segment Four – Part Four**

**The point of that little old story “The Explorer” is that with their maps they have become experts on the Amazon, but they have yet to experience a thing. Only the one man who dared to venture out into experience really knows what there is to offer there. You can be an expert without really knowing any authentic experience.**

**We can know much. We can even know much about the Bible and much about life. But it is when we open ourselves to this “ridiculously amazing” presence of this Alleluia God that it all comes to life. Call that resurrection, if you will. It is about our stepping out there in our lives only to know and trust that this Good Shepherd God of ours camouflages us with a love that is stronger than death and holds us in eternal life.**

**Jesus says of the sheep that God holds, “No one will snatch them out of my hand.” Believe the good news of the gospel—we can dare to live the Alleluia life. We can dare to be loved and love with a ridiculously amazing abandon—the Good Shepherd leads us into such life. Amen.**