

The Love of the Shepherd

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Introduction

There's a lot of talk about love today. People are looking for love. But as the old country song says, they're "looking for love in all the wrong places." People are forsaking the church to try and find love in the world. For the world claims to be more loving, accepting, and tolerant. And indeed, these people are accepting and tolerant of all kinds of things, if you agree with them. But if you disagree, they are anything but loving, accepting, and tolerant, and go on the offensive. They attack with the same hatred and animosity they denounce. Maybe it's time we stopped talking about love and began experiencing it.

Biblical Love: A Love Worth Experiencing

Where can we find a love worth experiencing? Since the love the world has to offer is inadequate, let's turn our attention to Scripture, specifically our Old Testament reading for today. We see love embodied in our Shepherd.

Shepherding

A shepherd is one who rules or governs. God often referred to the priests and kings as "shepherds of Israel." Some were good shepherds, who ruled well and took care of the people. Others were bad shepherds, who didn't care about the people but treated them poorly and led them into sin. God used the image of sheep and shepherd because of the unique relationship between them as opposed to those who take care of cattle. When you lead sheep, you don't drive them from behind, like cattle. The shepherd leads from the front.

From the Front – Guides and Defends

The shepherd leads from the front for two reasons—to defend and guide. When the shepherd goes in front, he will confront any wild animal in their path first. This puts him in the best position to defend the sheep, to protect them and keep them safe. This is also the best way to guide the sheep, so they know where to go. Soldiers are trained to follow the orders of officers. But they more readily obey the captain who says, "Follow me, boys" than the one who says, "You, go do this."

In the Midst – Relationship and Comfort

The sheep are willing to follow the shepherd because they trust him. According to Jesus, they follow him because they know his voice (**John 10:4**). Shepherds lived with their sheep. They spent time with them, caring for them, watching over them, just being there. This developed a relationship between sheep and shepherd. The shepherd earns the right to lead the sheep by this relationship developed with him in their midst.

Christ—Our Shepherd

The ruler that Micah is talking about, the one who will shepherd God's flock, is Jesus Christ. He is also the Shepherd of the New Israel, the church.

From the Front – Leads the Church and Defends Against All Enemies

(Read **Colossians 1:15-20**) Christ is the head of the church because He is God; He is the Creator and Sustainer of all things. He leads from the front as He is the *firstborn from the dead (v. 18)*. We follow Him wherever He leads, not blindly, but because He goes first and knows the way. He gives us security by defeating our enemies, sin, death, and the devil, as we talked about last week. He also gives this comforting promise (Read **Matthew 16:18**). Notice, that's not a defensive promise. Hell doesn't attack with its gates. This is a promise that the church will win an offensive war against hell and the devil. The church is under attack today. Jesus doesn't want us to just sit and take it. He wants us to take the fight to the world and the devil.

In the Midst

The shepherd wins the right to lead his sheep from the front by spending time in their midst, getting to know them, and the sheep getting to know him.

Emmanuel

(Read **Matthew 1:23**) There are several things that set Christianity apart from all other world religions. One is the doctrine of the Trinity; we are the only ones who worship the Triune God. Another is the doctrine of the Incarnation. We are the only ones whose God has come down to earth, become a man, and lived with His people. We can trust Him because He understands us (**Hebrews 4:14-16**).

Savior

The other big difference is our God didn't just become one of us and dwell with us, He also died for us. But He didn't stay dead; He rose from the dead three days later. God showed us what real love is. He gave up all He had to become one of us and to live with us. Then He died for us. But it doesn't end there. He rose from the dead, so He lives for us today and someday will come back for us to take us to our eternal home

Means of Grace

In the meantime, He is with us, showing His love for us in Word and Sacrament. When we receive His body and blood around this altar, He is in our midst, showing us His love by giving us forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. This is the **LOVE OF THE SHEPHERD**.

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
