

### THE GOOD SHEPHERD AND US!

A little four year old child lived next door to an elderly gentleman who had recently lost his wife. Upon seeing the man cry, the little boy went into the old gentleman's yard, climbed onto his lap, and just sat there. When his mother asked him what he had said to the neighbor, the little boy replied, "Nothing, I just helped him cry."

In the Bible reading today we heard Jesus say, "I am the Good Shepherd," and he is! And one of the ways Jesus shepherds his people is through the actions of that little four year old child!

When Jesus said, "I am the Good Shepherd," he wasn't just talking about his work with the first disciples some 2000 years ago. He was talking about his work in the second century and the third century and the fourth century and now in the 21st century. Jesus is hard at work as the Good Shepherd right now, right here among us.

The Easter message is clear. Jesus is not dead, but alive. Sin had no power over Jesus. Death had no power over Jesus. The grave had no power over Jesus. Jesus is the Strong One. Jesus is the Victorious One. Jesus is alive and that means he continues his work today.

We heard Jesus say this morning, "I am the Good Shepherd. I know my own and my own know me." Jesus knows you. He knows your name. He knows who you are. He knows all about you. He knows what you need. And he will provide for you.

We also heard Jesus say that he is the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. He's talking about you and what he is doing for you right now. Not only did Jesus lay down his life for you when he died on the cross, he continues to lay down his life for you. Every day he lays down his life for you. He goes all out to care for you. He stops at nothing to bring you the help you need.

How does he do that? Often he does that through people. In the first Bible reading for today, Peter made it clear that it was Jesus who was working through him when he healed a man. Still today Jesus works through people. People like our Stephen Ministers. People like those who serve in our shepherd ministry. People like Sunday school teachers and youth ministers. People like parents and grandparents. People like the little four year old boy who helped his neighbor grieve.

Let me ask you - are you letting Jesus work through you? Have you reached out to care for someone in this congregation, someone not in your family? Have you sent a card to someone who is sick or someone who seems a little down? Have you picked up the phone and called someone to see how they are doing? Have you sent an email to someone you haven't seen in church for awhile? Have you prepared some food for someone who is grieving the death of a

loved one? Have you visited someone in the hospital? Have you spoken to someone here at church whom you had not had a chance to meet previously?

The Guideposts Magazine reports that when the pastor at First United Methodist Church of Birmingham spoke to his congregation about the Stephen Ministry he said, "There are not enough of us ministers to help (all the people who hurting)." He's right. Jesus' work of shepherding people cannot be just the work of paid staff. Jesus wants to work through all of us. And that's the only way we can really reach everyone who needs care. Everyone of us can do something. Ask yourself: "what does the Good Shepherd want to do through me?"

It doesn't matter how old you are. You can be 4 years old or you can be 94 years old. Jesus can work through you to care for someone. It doesn't matter how long you have been following Jesus. You can be a brand new follower of Jesus or you can be a person who has been following Jesus your whole life. Jesus can work through you to care for someone.

Don't wait till someone from church asks you. Don't wait till you know more about the Bible. Don't wait till you have more time. Don't wait till the moment is just right. Let Jesus work through you to care for someone.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd. Right now. Right here. And he does his work through you and me. Listen again to the words we heard today from 1 John, chapter 3: "We know love by this, that Jesus Christ laid down his life for us - and we ought to lay down our lives for one another." And then it says, "Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action."

To that, let's all say, "AMEN!"