

Sermon- April 22nd 2018

Faith in Action Sunday

Grace and Peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ. Today we focus on the theme of Faith in Action. Our Gospel lesson talks about a profession that was common at the time of Jesus- Shepherd. Kind of interesting when we deal with professions today. A recent poll was conducted, (we will be subjected to many polls in the coming months), ranking the most and least trusted professions in terms of honesty and ethical standards. Nurses, Grade School Teachers and Medical Doctors received the highest grades. Lawyers, lobbyists and politicians received abysmal ratings. Clergy only rated at 42%. Not sure what that means.

Some cute stories:

A priest and a lawyer died and went to heaven on the same day, and St Peter showed them to their rooms. The lawyer's room was extremely large and lavish, but the priest's room was a little 10 by 10 cell with one window and a cot. The priest said, "St Peter, I have spent my entire life serving God, why do I get a crummy room and the lawyer gets the best room?" St Peter replied, "Well, we get thousands of priests up here, but this is the first lawyer we've ever had." I can tell that joke because our son is a lawyer.

Or this one about politicians:

A farmer finally decided to buy a TV. The store assured him that they would install the antenna and TV the next day. The next evening the farmer turned on his new TV and found only political ads on every channel, all the time. That was it- only political ads. At lunch, the same thing, only political ads- every channel. The next day, you got it, only political ads every channel. The farmer calls to complain and the owner says that appears impossible. But he agrees to send a repairman to investigate. The repairman checks the TV and sure enough, only political ads all the time on every channel. So he goes out to check the antenna. In a few minutes he returned and told the farmer he had found the problem. The antenna had been installed on top of the windmill and grounded to the manure spreader.

Which leads us to Gospel for today, the text of the Good Shepherd. I am the Good Shepherd, my sheep know my voice. When Jesus says these words he is speaking to mostly the religious leaders of his day.

They must have laughed because they had never heard of a good shepherd. Shepherds at the time of Jesus were worse than lawyers or politicians. Shepherds were dirty, smelly, uneducated, and usually anti-social drunkards. To say Good Shepherd was an oxymoron. Kind of like military intelligence. Shepherds were notorious for stealing sheep to make their flocks larger and when the weather turned ugly, or wolves descended upon their flocks, they usually would run away. But Jesus says, 'when you want to see what a Good Shepherd is, look at me. I know them. When they are in trouble I will help them. There is nothing I wouldn't do for them.' Yes, he is the Good Shepherd. We know his voice. You have heard it many times.

A good friend of mine, Pastor Bill White who served a large church in Madison recounted a story on one of his trips to the Holy Land. The tour bus stopped at a watering hill used for sheep. Shepherds descend upon the watering hole, each bringing their sheep down the hill to drink some water. Now, there are about 150 sheep all drinking water, all mixed up in the pond. Pastor Bill asks the tour guide, "how does the shepherd know which sheep are his"? Watch, says the tour guide. Each shepherd yells a different call. Ya Ya- Elia Elia- Boma Boma. And the sheep leave the pond, all following the voice of their shepherd. They knew his voice. And we too know the voice of our shepherd.

But today on this Faith in Action Sunday, we need to focus on sheep. That's us - the sheep. Who hear the voice of Jesus. The appropriate response for us as sheep is to be good sheep. Not perfect sheep, but to be good sheep - obedient sheep. You have heard the Temple Talk this morning. A challenge was given to all of us sheep to be obedient sheep.

Instead of only 94 people pledging to the campaign, we will have three times that amount. I am told that we have an anonymous donor that will give 20% of the total amount pledged if we reach 150 pledgers. Wow.

Can we do it? Yes we can. And the amount does not matter. Maybe you can pledge \$10,000 a year. Great. But maybe you can only pledge \$1 or \$2, or \$5 dollars a week. Great. We need you.

Great true story about Jewel. A single parent with two young children who was a member at my old church, OSLC in Appleton. We had a major capital campaign

and were asking all people to help with pledges. Jewel obviously had little financial resources. The first Monday after the campaign started there was a note in the churches mailbox. Here is what it said. Hi Pastor, Jewel here. Missed church yesterday. Had to work. I want to help with the building campaign. Here is a dollar. Wish I could give more but I can't right now. But I love you and my church. Keep praying for me and my girls. Love Jewel. Wow. The same dollar came in an envelope with a note every Monday - FOR 2 YEARS.

Obedient Sheep.

I have a dream - that we will all respond.

I have a dream that we will reach 300 pledgers, whatever the amount.

I have a dream that some of us will do what they ask at the Golden Arches. You know you order a Big Mac with fries and a soda. And the guy asks, "do you want to supersize that"?

Yes I have a dream that some of us will supersize that pledge.

I have a dream that we realize we can be obedient sheep. All of us - everyone counts or no one counts.

I have a dream that we realize that this is our church- all of us- not just some of us.

Make my dream come true.

Amen. Let it be so.