

**OPENING:**

At the beginning of it all, way back in Genesis, God made the world and pronounced it to be “Good”

The water,

the earth,

the animals

and us are all:

“Good... very Good.”

More recently, in 1985, Michael Jackson wrote a song called “Bad” which, confusingly, actually meant “Good.”

In the middle of those two pronouncements, John writes our Gospel and talks about the “Good” Shepherd.

We hear it as “Good” as in the opposite of “Bad.”

Sounds pretty simple: whereas the wolf is bad, the shepherd is good.

The Greek word is *kalos* and it can be translated as:

“ordered, sound, noble... true, competent, faithful, and praiseworthy.”

“Effective” or “authentic.”<sup>1</sup>

The Greek has the sentence ending with the adjective, as a post-positive, so it could be translated as “I am the Shepherd that is Good.”

It means that we are supposed to pay attention to the descriptor.<sup>2</sup>

In our culture, I have found that I am pronounced a (quote unquote) “Good dad” if I do virtually any parenting correctly. As long as you are standing up on two legs and your child appears to be alive, you will be considered a “good Dad.” (The bar for mothers is much higher)

But this word “good” here (describing the Shepherd) needs to have a little more of an edge to it, a little bite, it’s not an innocuous term of approval.

The “good” in “Good Shepherd” has a little more oomph than that.

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<sup>1</sup> Feasting on the Word, HP 449,451; Moloney, 310

<sup>2</sup> Moloney, 303.

We know this because, immediately after this passage, the Pharisees say that Jesus is insane.<sup>3</sup> This is because this title of the “good shepherd” would have been an affront to the religious establishment, to the elite and educated.<sup>4</sup> If Jesus were merely a decent or passable shepherd, they probably would not have seen him as such a threat.

Let’s spend some time this morning examining what it means for us to follow this “Good” Shepherd. And what are we then called to do in response to that call.

## **APPEARANCE**

Let’s start with another possible translation for the word that we can translate as “Good”: “Beautiful.”

We know from our Bible that there was once a “beautiful Shepherd” way back in the day, his name was David. (The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm this morning should have jogged your memory.) God had told Samuel to pick a king, and to do so not based on appearance, not on the outward looks.

But then he saw David and God rearranged his criteria. God said choose that one... why... because that’s a beautiful child.

What was going on in God’s curious decision-making there?

We don’t have to answer that question other than for it roust us out of this vanilla description of “Good” Shepherd. There’s something more at stake here, more alluring, more dynamic.

So consider when you hear the term “Good Shepherd”... think of it as instead...

The “beautiful” Shepherd.

The “handsome” Shepherd.

A shepherd that is so captivating that we, in turn, are drawn to the person.

We are attracted magnetically, we are entranced.

We need not go too far with this idea, of physical beauty, to be sure, but we should admit that the rules seem to go out the window, normal calculations about life and love and loss evaporate when the “Shepherd” is involved, and we are drawn to his voice and his face because it’s “good.”

In this word “Good,” I think there’s something here about God’s ability to love humanity, even flawed humanity. God is smitten with us, like a parent doting on a child. Like a shepherd, a good one, loving his dirty and idiotic and cute sheep.

The Gospels writers had another way of thinking about this:

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<sup>3</sup> John 10.19-21

<sup>4</sup> Feasting on the Word, PP

about whose faces we follow, about who are the Shepherds and who are Wolves in sheep clothing. They talked about it in terms of a coin, which then as now, had faces on them.

In Jesus' time, you have the face of Emperor imprinted on one side of every coin in the Roman Empire. They sent out coins bearing his image all across the land to make the Emperor's face known, all of them being the same image.

Because it's important that we know that face. That's who we are supposed to love and be attracted to.

Meanwhile God made humanity, and it was the opposite, each face was different, and he desperately wants to know each of us, to love us and to seek us out.

Especially those who have strayed from the flock, who are grimy pocket change in the floorboards, and in the couch cushions. That's who God is searching for.

## **BAD SHEPHERD**

That brings us to the sense that the Jesus as the Shepherd is actually "Bad."

At least in the literal sense of shepherding.

He would have been kicked out of the shepherding company for leaving the 99 to find the 1.

And getting himself killed for it.

What good is a dead shepherd?<sup>5</sup>

This reminds us that we should not confuse "good" with technical proficiency.

A "Good Electrician" might feature a person that be "bad."

That's a reminder that we are not the Good Shepherd, we are not Jesus.

We are, perhaps, Good Shepherd wannabees, but whenever we feel like actually are, we should get to know him better.<sup>6</sup>

Why is the shepherd "good" in this case?

Because he knows the sheep. He thinks that the sheep are the beautiful ones and is willing to die for them.

That goes beyond just "good."

How can the shepherd, realistically speaking, go after the one and forsake the 99?

The other 99 have his presence and each other.

## **CONCLUSION**

"I am the Good Shepherd" ~ Jesus says.

Another possible synonym is "Choice" as in Wine.

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<sup>5</sup> Feasting on the Gospel, EP

<sup>6</sup> Feasting on the Gospel PP, 18

Or “Model” as in “Ideal.”<sup>7</sup> “I am the Choice Shepherd.”

This is from the good strain, the good vintage and stock, that’s where this Shepherd comes from. Interesting point is that Israel was already agricultural, longed for the Pastoral. So all the great leaders were termed “Shepherds.”<sup>8</sup>

It means “modeled” after a shepherd in the OT, links to Moses, David, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.<sup>9</sup>

Story about Bible Mobile in Culpeper and the meaning of  
“The Lord is My Shepherd and I shall not be in want.”

In our culture, we don’t have that type of imagery, that of the Good Shepherd. You can be Iron Man, or Falcon Soldier but not a Fisher King/ A Clown Savior. In Jesus’ time they did not either. To be good, meant to be strong, it meant to have power. It meant it was okay to be “bad.” To be a good leader meant possessing authority, logical discretion.

“The King of Love, My Shepherd is.” It makes no sense.

In a world of loneliness and isolation, God is searching for us.

In this Eastertide, we are reminded that Jesus rose from the tomb and continues to search for us.

**AMEN**

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<sup>7</sup> Brown, 386

<sup>8</sup> Brown, 397.

<sup>9</sup> Feasting on the Word, EP