

Christian Education/Evangelism Sunday - The Sixteenth Sunday After Pentecost

September 20, 2009

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

John 10:2-4, 14-16

The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.... "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me--just as the Father knows me and I know the Father--and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. (NIV)

A young man by the name of Charles Spurgeon was building quite a reputation as a fantastic preacher. Later, he would be nicknamed the "prince of preachers." On one Sunday he delivered a sermon that had the whole congregation talking about it. In fact, all week long the buzz was all over London about Charles Spurgeon and his sermon. Everybody was talking about this young powerful preacher. The next Sunday people were lined up at the church doors. Some people waited in line for over an hour to get the best seats. Almost the whole town poured into the *New Park Street Chapel* until every seat was full including the balcony and window sills. The rest of the people had to find standing room only. Then came the time for the sermon and you could hear a pin drop. As Charles Spurgeon climbed into the pulpit everyone was on the edge of their seat ready to hear what this young preacher was about to say. All the people wanted to know how he could possibly top the message from last week. Then he simply said: "There will be no sermon this week for all week long all I heard was talk about Charles Spurgeon and how he is such a great preacher. Last week I must not have done my task for all week long the talk should have been about Christ and how He is such a great Savior. So like John the Baptist today I will simply point you to Jesus saying: "Look the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

As we begin another year of Sunday School and Adult Bible Study, as we begin what I pray will be the beginning of a year round friendship evangelism program, I want us to consider what we at Amazing Grace are all about. What do we want the children who attend our Sunday School classes this year to come away saying? What do we want visitors who come to worship with us here to think? What do we want those who attend any one of our programs to walk away with? Do we want others to think highly of us as teachers or as a pastor or as a congregation? Do we want others to be impressed by our well done programs? Sure. But much more important than having people say: "wow what amazing teachers or gifted pastor or nice people or exciting programs they have at Amazing Grace," we want people to know and say: "wow we have an amazing Savior. We have an awesome God who rescued us and loves us and made us His own." In these selected verses from John we will consider this truth upon which we stand and which I pray becomes our mission to share: **We have a great Savior. He feeds His sheep. He brings in other sheep.**

In these familiar verses of Jesus as our Good Shepherd we find what the mission of Christ's church is all about. Jesus wants to feed His sheep. Jesus gives us exactly what we need to do this - His Word. ***"The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice."*** Jesus wants to teach His Word to His sheep so they know His voice. He wants us to listen to Him. After all, our Savior calls each of us by name. At our baptisms He put His arms around us and brought us into the fold. He speaks to us from the time we are young lambs until the time we are gray-bearded mature sheep. He feeds His flock with His life-giving Word. Do you see why we place such an emphasis here at Amazing Grace on the Word? This is the voice of our Good Shepherd. This is the food that gives life and the food that sustains us. That is why we have Sunday School, and Bible Studies, and a sermon, and Toddler Power hour, and Pioneers. Then God's Word is taught and God's sheep are fed.

This year as in every year there are two main doctrines, two basic teachings we will hear (and we need to hear them) again and again and again. The first is that, as Isaiah says: ***"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way" (53)***. From the youngest ewe lamb in here to our eldest sheep we all have one thing in common - sin. We are born steeped in it. We don't always follow the voice of the Good Shepherd. We stubbornly turn our own way. We lie. We cheat. We are selfish and self serving. We misuse God's name and too often ignore His Word. We gossip and hurt our neighbors. We are not always content with what we have. We sin and sin and sin some more. We like sheep have gone astray and deserve to be left to die in our own sin. We deserve not just to be swallowed up by our enemies but to be punished by God - here and eternally. This is a message we will tell and hear again and again.

But we also have another message to tell and hear, don't we? ***"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me--and I lay down my life for the sheep."*** Plain and simple, we sinners have a great Savior. Instead of punishing the wayward sheep, God loved us so much that He took His perfect, sinless Son and laid all our sins on Him. Jesus loved you and me so much that He willingly laid down His life for us. On the cross Jesus, the Lamb of God, took our punishment. Jesus took away our sin and God clothes us in Jesus' perfection so that our wool is as white as snow. Our Good Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep and took it up again on the third day brought us safely into God's flock. In God's fold He watches over us. Our Good Shepherd will one day He take us to the eternal pastures of joy in heaven where we will be free from all enemies forever. This is a message we will hear at Amazing Grace again and again. We are forgiven. Jesus has done it all for us. We are His sheep. He is our Good Shepherd. We have a great Savior who feeds us with His Word.

What a blessing to be one of Jesus' sheep! Isn't it a wonderful thing to know that because we have a great Savior our sins are forgiven and our guilt removed - to know we have a God who is always watching our back - to know that heaven is our home? It is great to be one of Jesus' sheep. And do you know what the Good Shepherd still has in mind? He wants to bring more sheep in: ***"I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd."*** There is a reason Jesus has not returned yet to destroy the world and judge all people. There are more sheep yet to be brought into the fold. The

Good Shepherd is still gathering souls into His safe arms. And do you know who our great Savior uses to go and proclaim the good news that changes hearts and lives? He uses us! That's right, God doesn't rely solely on his holy angels for this work, He doesn't use a mighty voice from heaven or miraculous signs here on earth - God uses people - people like you and me. God allows us the privilege and joy of sharing in the work of telling others so they too might become Jesus' sheep. They too may listen to His voice. They too might be saved.

Who do you know that needs to know Jesus is a great Savior? As we leave this morning our evangelism elder Mike Grimes will hand out these (friends who need Jesus) cards to everyone. Please hold onto these and whenever you have time fill these out and really think about it and keep it somewhere visible for the next year. On average most people have 6-8 people they know who do not have any church. What I am asking every family at Amazing Grace to do is target at least 3 families or people who need Jesus. Over the course of this next year pray for them. Look for opportunities to tell them about our great Savior. Make it our goal that sometime within this next year, with God's blessing, we might bring one or two of these people to church with us, or to a Bible Study, or to sit down with me as your pastor for Bible information class. My prayer is that you bring me so many people that I can't schedule all the Bible information classes. We are also starting a Bible class this morning focusing on *Lifestyle Witnessing*. This class is to help us all do exactly what we are asking - that we create and look for opportunities to tell others about our great Savior. Just think how wonderful it would be if the Lord uses everyone of us over this next year to bring at least one more lost sheep safely into His fold.

Some time ago when I went to the hospital to visit one of our members a man I had never seen before came down the hall looked straight at me and said: "*She's going to make it. She's better. She is going to make it.*" You could just see the joy in this man's eyes as he hurried down the hall. I have never seen the man since and I had no idea who he was talking about. But I'm sure it was probably someone near to him - someone he cared about deeply. I'm also pretty sure he had just received some good news and could not wait to share it - even if he did not know the person with whom he shared it. It was news so good it just had to be told.

How much more is this true for us who have been set free from sin, delivered from the devil, and redeemed from the pit of hell! How much more is this true of us who have tasted that the Lord is good and whose eyes have seen our salvation! We have good news that just has to be told - to friends - to family - to neighbors - to fellow workers - to all. When people come away from anything we do here at Amazing Grace, when they come into contact with any of our people - I pray they realize one thing for sure - we have a great Savior! That's why at Amazing Grace we strive to teach and preach all God's Word in it's truth and purity - that's why we do all we can to tell others - we want everyone to know Jesus and His incomparable love. He is the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep. Our Savior is great indeed! Teach this good news. Reach out with this good news. Amen.