

*The Fourth Sunday of Easter  
Good Shepherd Sunday*

May 3, 2009

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

1 John 3:1-2

***How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. (NIV)***

Imagine this scenario: a shepherd is watching a flock of sheep when vicious wolves come to attack these sheep. The shepherd steps in front of the sheep and the wolves attack the shepherd. The wolves kill the shepherd. Why would the shepherd risk his life for these kind of dumb animals called sheep? Why would a shepherd lay down his life for those sheep who could care less and love to wander? The truth is that most shepherds probably wouldn't give up their lives for some sheep. Chances are if it came right down to their lives or the lives of their sheep most shepherds would not hesitate to make their escape.

Now imagine this scenario: a father is watching his little son playing out in a field. A pack of wild dogs suddenly come up to attack the boy. The father steps in front of dogs and the dogs attack the father as his son runs to safety. The dogs kill the father. Which father would not do this for his son? Chances are any parent would do whatever it takes to protect their child. Even it means laying down your life, most would do it in an instant for their children.

***“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!”*** This morning let us stand in awe for a few minutes and marvel with the apostle John at what our God has done for us. Let us marvel for a few minutes at what the Good Shepherd has done for you and me. Let us gladly proclaim: **How great is the love the Father has lavished on us! We are His children in this world. We will be his children at home in heaven.**

John, in such a simple and direct manner, points out the obvious. God has been good to us. His love for us is beyond all understanding. How great is the love of God the Father! John can barely believe it himself how this love has been lavished upon us. That we should be called children of God is astounding. That's what we are. That's what we are because of Jesus the Righteous One who gave His life on the cross as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. We are children of God because we are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for everyone baptized into Christ have clothed themselves with Christ. We are children of God because through the gospel God the Father adopted each of us as His own child.

I don't know what life would have been like without my mom and dad and I don't want to know. What a blessing to have parents who love, and protect, and guide, and feed, and discipline you! What a blessing to have a mom and dad to take care of you and your every need! Now Jesus says to think about this: ***“If you then, though you are evil,***

***know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven” (Luke 11).*** How great is it to have a Father in heaven who loves, and protects, and guides, and feeds, and disciplines you! How wonderful it is to have a Father in heaven who takes care of you and your every need!

We are God’s children in this world. John writes concerning this, ***“the reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.”*** The world does not really understand believers. They don’t understand the fellowship we have with God and how our trust and hope and joy are all found in God. The world doesn’t understand the gospel’s one-sided sacrificial love. The world doesn’t understand the cross or the mystery of faith. The world doesn’t understand when children of God don’t join in all its bragging and boasting. So the world does not know us because it does not know Jesus.

So, in this world, God’s children still suffer. We suffer pain and persecution. While my parents took great care of me, I still got sick, broke bones, suffered bruises and heartache. Our Father in heaven who has control over all things could prevent this all. We might think He should or would. But our Father doesn’t. Instead God the Father allows suffering in this world for His children. He allows hurt and heartache. He allows pain and sadness. Then what is the benefit of being children of God? ***“How does the Father lavish us with His great love again?,”*** we might ask.

The Father is always watching out for His children. Our Father is always there to provide the strength His children need through His Word and promises. Like the Father did for the disciples in our first lesson, He gives His children courage to speak His Word boldly when persecuted. Our Father is always working things out for the good of His children. The angels, and there are multitudes of them, are always at the Father’s beckon call to attend His children. Our Father is always available and near when His children need to talk to Him. The Father is always pointing His children to their sin and then to Jesus who is the Savior from sin. Our Father is always giving His children reminders that this world is not our home. For while we are God’s children here in this world, we will one day be His children at home in heaven.

John writes, ***“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”*** ***“Dear friends”*** does not quite capture what John writes in the original language. John uses a word that describes us as dearly beloved, as ones who are the objects of God’s great love. As God’s dearly loved children we can’t begin to comprehend what our Father has in store for us. It has not yet been made known. But when Jesus returns for us we will know for we shall be like Him. We will see Jesus as He is! This is our eager and joyful expectation. We look forward to heaven. We look forward to a home of righteousness. We look forward to only happiness and no more sorrow. We look forward to having perfect glorified bodies. We look forward to being with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and all of our family members forever. We look forward to the day the sons of God are revealed and that, as Paul writes, ***“creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God” (Romans 8)***

Perhaps you have heard of the story about the death of Princess Alice Gladstone. Her little daughter was critically ill with diphtheria - which I looked up in the dictionary and it says it is ***“an acute infectious disease characterized by severe inflammation of***

**the throat, heart, and nervous system.”** The mother was forbidden by the physician to kiss her girl because of the almost certain danger of contracting the disease. In one of the child’s fits of delirium, the mother was so distressed that she took her little girl in her arms and gently soothed her. The little girl looked up into her mother’s face and cried, “*Mama, kiss me.*” This was too much for mom’s heart. Without stopping to think, the princess held her tight and kissed her little child’s lips. But it was the kiss of death and before many days the child got well, but the mother lay there cold and pale until she died. Which good parent wouldn’t love their child and even give their own life for their children?

But what shepherd would die for some sheep? What shepherd would love sheep so much that He would gladly lay down his life for these kind of dumb animals who like to wander? Only the Good Shepherd would do such a thing. Why would a shepherd sacrifice himself for sheep, because once the shepherd is dead the sheep would still be in danger? Only the Good Shepherd could protect His sheep from all danger because Jesus knew that not only did He have the authority to lay His life down, but He had the authority to take His life up again. So Jesus suffered for sheep. Jesus died for sinners. Our Good Shepherd stepped in front of all our enemies who might harm us and defeated them all by His resurrection from the dead! Now we are not only sheep who like to go astray, we are forgiven and redeemed children of God the Father. Our Good Shepherd loves and cares for His children so much He promises nothing can snatch us from His hand. “***How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!***” May we now live as His children in this world until the day the Good Shepherd takes us home to the green pastures of heaven. Amen.