

WHICH FLOCK?

Today's gospel reading is one heard many times before and for many the picture of Jesus holding the sheep in his arms comes to mind. I want us to look at these verses in quite a different way. We have called the Bible the *living word*, if indeed it is, then we can be certain that we can look at familiar stories or verses in a new light in order to gain insight and new application to our life. Not where we were, but where we are right now and just as importantly for where we are going!

If we cannot apply the *living word* of God to our everyday lives then it is time to turn off the lights and lock the doors! When the Bible and its words carry no meaning in our lives and the words no longer speak to us then how can we be a better person and make things better around us? The question today comes down to **"which flock are you in?"** In comparing "flocks" maybe we can have a clearer picture and realize where we are or are not.

Though we generally do not like labels, a few may be helpful to distinguish the various "*flocks*". A few labels that come to mind are **casual** and **committed** or **disinterested** and **passionate**. We can put these labels on many different groups of people from youth in their interest of school to senior citizens and their interest in politics, but this morning I want to focus on **our flock here at Centennial** and where we are as disciples of Jesus Christ, our Good Shepherd.

In this morning's comparisons the two labels that reflect a big difference are **"casual"** and **"committed"**. We can all picture right away an immediate difference when applying them to people. We may even admire someone who is *casual* in their approach, but as a Disciple is that who we could count on? Or put another way, *casual* may infer that eight out of ten times you could count on them to be there and the other two times not. Would one be left to wonder **"which two times?"** *Not too reassuring.* Here's an example: *Say you are on a relay team whether it is track or swimming. What if you could only count on the anchor of the relay team person only eight out of ten times to finish? For any athletic team, commitment is an important ingredient for a successful team. Then how much more important is it for us to be committed, not casual about our faith?*

So why am I talking about the sheep, the flock and not the good shepherd? We know from the words and promises of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, what we can expect; however, **what flock are we going to be a member of – the casual one or the committed one? When we hear His voice will we know Him and follow or wander off on our own way?**

Now it is not to say that a **"casual Christian"** is a bad person, however, they tend to blend into the flock, and gauge their morality by comparing themselves to others, not God's standard. They, like the committed Christian, avoid committing "big" sins, but rationalize little sins. The casual Christian fears

getting caught while the **“committed Christian’s desire”** is to not offend God in any way. The **committed Christian admits their sin and is quick to repent.**

The **“casual Christian”**, when it comes to money, gives but does not sacrifice. It is a mindset that does not allow for real sacrificial giving. They give to charity and church, but only as long as it does not impinge on their way of living. **The “committed Christian” gives because they are blessed and want to share with others. Even if they are not blessed, they give like the woman in the temple who Jesus spoke of “all the others gave what they’ll never miss; she gave what she couldn’t afford—she gave her all.”** For the **“committed Christian”** the verses from Matthew 6:21 where Jesus again speaks to the flock – **“for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”**. Do we hear His voice, do we follow Him?

The **“casual Christian”** indeed wants to go to heaven and see Jesus, but right now and right here it’s let’s live the good life, no sacrifice, no discomfort, and a life of doing things not out of sacrifice, but convenience. **The “committed Christian” knows the real meaning of sacrifice and is willing to reach out when it is not so convenient.**

How many of us would if called in the middle of the night answer that call of inconvenience if it meant losing sleep, rearranging the coming day to be beside a friend in need?

Being a “committed Christian” means being committed to other Christians too. For the **“committed Christian”** the words from Colossians 3 **“set your mind on things above not on the things that are on earth”** the **“committed”** come forth because they hear his voice and know the right thing to do without concern for self.

The Bible, for the **“casual Christian”** believe, oh yes, the Bible is true, but they are selective in how it shapes the way they live. The **“hard”** parts are ignored and verses are often quoted out of context with one motive in mind – for their benefit!

For the “committed Christian”, the Bible is a wealth of knowledge they can use to live life. They literally thirst for its words and with the help of the Holy Spirit, to find meaning and application. The Bible is the greatest self-help book ever written or will be written. Not to say other books can’t be beneficial, but for the **“committed Christian”** we must return to the Word for the answers to the way we will live and follow Him and hear His voice – that of our Good Shepherd.

The “committed Christian” never believes they “know it all”. They take any opportunity to learn, whether it’s Sunday morning, small group or a Bible study and to share what they have learned with others.

Now here are two elements that really go hand in hand – church and worship. The **“casual Christian”** attends church expecting the best music, the best preaching and the best children’s program. Church is a

“consumer” activity. **The “committed Christian” knows those are elements of church, but God desires us and our hearts. Yes, can come expecting to meet God, have His presence in worship, but if we come with that attitude of “this is all for me” then we will surely miss Him.**

And that leads us to worship. The “casual Christian” expects the service is all for them. **The “committed Christian” praises God no matter the circumstances they find themselves in. They give back to God praise for who he is and what he has done.**

Is it easy when we just had a disagreement with our spouse or young person? No, but when we turn our focus to God it is amazing as God showers us with His grace and gives us a peace that the matter becomes much smaller and of less importance.

No matter whether young or old when we stay stuck in that place we are not going to come out of it by wallowing in it. *Wallow is spending time in a place without doing anything to change it.* Exactly!!!! **Worship is to God and the “side effects” on us are amazing, if we hear His voice through His presence and follow where it leads us.** For the “casual Christian” worship becomes a meaningless exercise they go through just to look good. The words of songs have no meaning because they have been sung so many times. They become timekeepers, timing the pastor’s sermon, knowing how much extra time the Communion will add to the service and how long the service is any day down to minutes and seconds. Is it any wonder worship has become what it has for them when there are no expectations?

For the “committed Christian” the songs, the prayers and communion have meaning adding to the overall worship. There is an old, old saying “*you get out of it what you put it into it*”, never truer than in worship. I gave you a verse in a sermon from Malachi 3:10, “*I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won’t have enough room to take it in!*” That applies to worship too.

In closing a story of the committed and casual sheep:

The first group of sheep had decided to look to shepherd & follow him wherever he leads. These are the “good sheep” who follow the “Good Shepherd. Jesus said: *“my sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.”*

The 2nd group wants nothing to do with the shepherd. They want to run their lives their own way and they deliberately decide to walk away from him. These are the pagans and atheists of society. They don't want to hear Jesus' voice... They don't want to follow.

But the 3rd group decides that they like the shepherd. They want to hang out with him... But they don't want to get too close to him. They still want to keep their options open. They want to look for their own grass once in a while. They want to nibble at a little of this and a little of that... that's the problem with this 3rd group of sheep. They like being close to Jesus... Just not too much, and not just all the time. And because they have this “loose” connection to the shepherd they're the

ones who end up wandering off. They're the ones that end up getting lost. They're just close enough to the shepherd to feel secure--just far enough away to not hear his voice. And so, they wander off into their own little world, and they end up getting hurt and making bad decisions. And those bad decisions cause them pain and heartache. Because they've chosen not to listen to the Good Shepherd and to follow him closely, they are without the protection of that shepherd.

Which flock are you?

May we all be “committed” sheep to our Good Shepherd, Jesus.

Amen.