**Good Shepherds**

**Look at the picture on the cover because it gives us a sense there were and still are all kinds of shepherds throughout time. Today this will not be the usual form of sermon I use. I almost always preach from the Gospel lesson. But with these readings on this Sunday, I couldn’t resist to step out of my usual form. An Old Testament reading concerning all sorts of shepherds is just too relevant a story not to preach on this fine day. Also, this Sunday all the readings weave together. Plus, today we have David’s most famous Psalm, “The Lord is My Shepherd.” When we come to the sequence hymn, notice this Hymn, “Open Your Ears.” I chose it because it has a rather familiar sound to it of the Old Testament.**

**Now to the shepherds. Here is the first line from this Old Testament reading catching my immediate attention. “Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the Lord.” God then told these shepherds they had scattered the flock through their evil deeds. Another direct quotation gives us the whole sense of this wonderful Old Testament reading from Jeremiah. “Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, …”**

**Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter. They were in the beginning of shepherds watching their sheep or in some shepherd’s work destroying and scattering their sheep. There have always been all sorts of shepherds, just like there are all sorts of different people, but we’re not all shepherds who have the task of leading sheep and or people. There have always been really good shepherds, good shepherds, and sort of good shepherds. Of course, we also have the sort of bad shepherds, the bad shepherds and the really bad shepherds.**

**I could spend the rest of this sermon taking about all these characters through history. Yet we live now in this time. In this very fast quick moving time, we have some very good shepherds, and some really bad shepherds. You know who these people are. Some we see on televisions every day, some good and bad shepherds we may never see. Because they quietly work for good, or nefarious shepherds because they quietly work the bad forces among us.**

**What can we do about all these good and bad shepherds among us? We can discern, not judge but discern who are the leading shepherds right now, and who are the good shepherds and the bad ones. This is one way I know to discern the differences between our leader shepherds. Study their faces; they tell the story of where their hearts and souls reside. Good faces have laugh lines and often we can see these faces smiling. They have little to fear so their faces are clear glances into their souls. Those leader shepherds who have things to hide have clouded faces. There is one sure way to know the shepherd’s intent simply by looking at their mouths. Good shepherd leaders’ mouths turn upwards, while bad shepherd leaders mouth turn downwards. The bad shepherd’s mouths look like an upside-down smile.**

**So, what are we to do? Yesterday was the anniversary of John Lewis death. This weekend people are holding vigils in his memory all over our country. During his life John Lewis spent almost all of his time fighting for social justice and voting rights for every citizen. In these famous words he gave to all of us is one of our answers on what we can do. He said, “We can get into good trouble.” As we attempt to keep voting rights sacred , there is no better time to get into good trouble. All acts helping the good are acts of good trouble. Small acts of kindness can be acts of good trouble. Because in doing small acts of kindness, we need to go out of our way to do something for another human being. It takes a conscious commitment and then effort to do those small acts of kindness. To remember a grocery clerk stands on their feet all day, and they must get very tired. By a small effort for the people we meet, we can make a positive difference. We can lift people’s spirits with a few kind words and a smile. This is one example of getting into good trouble. Of course. it’s a small act of kindness. But consider what would happen if more of us took the time to just give a little comfort to those around us. There is no act of kindness too small to not be considered good trouble. Good trouble starts by doing those small deeds helping each other.**

**We are the lucky ones because we know the lord is our shepherd. David wrote these wonderful words so long ago. Yet our hearts and souls still respond to the beautiful and truthful words. They tell us our Good Shepherd will always lead us by the still waters. They let us know, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” Let these words flow over all of us like the healing balm of Gilead, remembering we are never alone because the lord is our shepherd.**

**Now finally here is what Jesus thought and did for so many people who crowded around him on one fateful day. His actions done on this earth for others so long ago. are done for us today. Here is the core of what Jesus thought and did on this special day when he would also feed five thousand hungry people. “As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.” And I’m sure he does the same for us in our time and place. He was and always will be our Good Shepherd. Helping us in all ways, through our hard times and in the times when we reach out and do for others he is always with us. Helping us say the right words, helping us to know what to do for one another.**

**We must always remember Jesus was a rabble rouser and he knew how to get into good trouble. He is our guide and our light. He will never let any of us down. We can always turn to him and know he will help us. Thank God for the little good shepherds among us who help our lord, our Good Shepherd in small ways and big ways to get into good trouble. Amen**