

**APRIL 25, 2010 GOOD SHEPHERD**

**WHEN IT'S GOOD TO BE A FOLLOWER**

**JOHN 10:22-30**

**I FIND IT INTERESTING THAT IN OUR ERA, MANY PEOPLE BRISTLE AT THE THOUGHT OF BEING SHEEP. THE IMAGE JESUS USED TO DESCRIBE HIS FOLLOWERS DOES NOT PLAY WELL TODAY. IT IS NOT GREAT FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS. OCCASIONALLY, I HAVE HAD YOUNGER PEOPLE SAY TO ME, "I DON'T WANT TO BE SOME DUMB SHEEP, FOLLOWING A RELIGION BLINDLY." BEING A SHEEP CONJURES UP THESE PEOPLE WHO GIVE THEIR WILLS OVER TO AN UNSCRUPULOUS LEADER LEADING TO UNHEALTHY CONSEQUENCES.**

**I FIND IT INTERESTING THAT PEOPLE WILL BALK AT FOLLOWING JESUS OR RELIGION IN GENERAL, BECAUSE THEY WANT TO BE INDEPENDENT AND FREE-THINKING. YET THESE WILL BE THE SAME PEOPLE THAT WILL FLOCK TO YOUTUBE LIKE ZOMBIES TO WATCH A PIANO-PLAYING CAT. THESE ARE THE SAME PEOPLE THAT WILL SIT FOR HOURS SPONGING UP EVERY COMMERCIAL SHOWN TO THEM. MEDIA, POLITICS, COMMERCE, ARE ALL ABOUT ATTRACTING MILLIONS OF FOLLOWERS.**

**WHEN I WAS A BOY AND MAY HAVE GOTTEN INTO MISCHIEF WITH A BUNCH OF FRIENDS I WAS TOLD BY MY PARENTS, "BE A LEADER, NOT A FOLLOWER." BUT THEY NEVER SAID ANYTHING ABOUT BEING A GOOD LEADER OR A BAD LEADER, JUST DON'T BE A FOLLOWER. IT WAS A MIXED MESSAGE, ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU ARE PART OF A FAITH WHERE FOLLOWING IS A GOOD THING.**

**HOWEVER, THE SCRIPTURE ITSELF WARNS US ABOUT THE SAME THING. MANY WILL COME IN JESUS' NAME, BUT THEY WILL BE FALSE LEADERS. THEY WILL BRING US DOWN THE WRONG PATH IF WE FOLLOW THEM. IT CAN GET VERY TRICKY BEING A FOLLOWER. THE MESSAGE, ON THE SURFACE, MAY SOUND VERY GOOD, BUT UNDERNEATH MAY BE ROTTEN. THIS IS HOW MANY ATYRANT ATTRACTS FOLLOWERS. THEY TELL THE PEOPLE WHAT THEY WANT TO HEAR UNTIL THEY ARE IN POWER. THEN THEY TELL THE PEOPLE WHAT TO DO OR ELSE.**

**WITH JESUS IT IS GOOD TO BE A FOLLOWER. HE TELLS US HIMSELF THAT THOSE WHO FOLLOW HIM KNOW HIM AND HE KNOWS THEM. FROM THE BEGINNING, A RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS IS NOT OF A MASTER AND**

**SLAVE, OR SOME DOMINATING RELIGIOUS LEADER. IT IS MORE LIKE FRIEND OR BELOVED SIBLING. HE IS GOD'S ONLY SON AND WE ARE GOD'S CHILDREN, SO WE ARE RELATIVES. WE CAN BE ASSURED WE ARE LOVED BY HIM AND HE WOULD DO NOTHING TO HARM US AND SURELY WOULD NEVER ENCOURAGE US TO HARM ANOTHER OR HAR OURSELVES.**

**JESUS IS SAFE TO FOLLOW BECAUSE HIS VOICE IS TRUSTWORTHY AND SAFE. WHEN WE HAVE A DEEP RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM, WE CAN FEEL PROTECTED AND LOVED, IN LIFE, AND EVEN IN DEATH, ETERMNALLY. THE BOND BETWEEN JESUS AND THOSE WHO HEAR HIM AND LOVE HIM AND LIVE HIS WAY IS UNBREAKABLE, FOREVER. WHEN WE RELATE TO EACH OTHER, IT CAN HAVE ITS UPS AND DOWNS. WE CAN HAVE BREAK-UPS OR ROUGH TIMES OF EMOTIONAL SEPARATION. JESUS TELLS US, THAT WHEN WE ARE DEEPLY RELATED TO HIM, HE WILL NEVER SEPARATE FROM US, BUT LOVE US FOREVER.**

**I SUPPOSE IT IS A LITTLE WEIRD TO BE A SHEEP. YET THE WHOLE IMAGE IS ABOUT THE SHEPHERD BEING EVER ALERT AND KEEPING OUR ENEMIES AT BAY. WE CAN TRUST THAT HE CAN GET US THROUGH OUR GREATEST CRISES AND OUR DARKEST MOMENTS. WE FOLLOW BECAUSE WE BELIEVE THAT HE WILL GET US THROUGH ANYTHING, EVEN DEATH. HE GIVES US VALUE. WE FOLLOW BEST WHEN WE FEEL CARED FOR, WHEN WE ACTUALLY DEEPLY FEEL LOVE DBY GOD.**

**IT IS GOOD TO BE A FOLLOWER WHEN PEACE IS AN OUTCOME. WHENEVER WE CONFRONT THE IMAGE OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD OR THE SHEPHERD AS GOD, ALONG WITH IT ARE IMAGES OF REST AND RESTORATION. WE LONG TO BE "BESIDE THE STILL WATERS" AT TIME SIN OUR LIVES. WE LONG FOR TOUGH SITUATIONS TO BE TRANSFORMED INTO PEACEFUL TIMES AND LEARNING EXPERIENCES.**

**BEING A PART OF CHRIST'S FLOCK, THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH, CAN BE AN OASIS IN THIS TROUBLED WORLD IF WE ALL SEE OURSELVES AS LOVING FOLLOWERS. FOR THE LOVE OF GOD WAS NEVER A ONE WAY STREET. THE LORD TOLD US IT IS THREE WAY, LIKE THE TRINITY ITSELF. LOVE GOD, LOVE THE OTHER, LOVE SELF.**

**WHEN PETER WAS CALLED OUT OF THE BOAT BY THE LORD, HE BEGAN SINKING AND DROWNING. HE COULD NOT HOLD HIMSELF UP. THE LORD REACHED OUT HIS HAND AND SAVE HIM. WE FOLLOW BECAUSE HE**

**DOES THE SAME FOR US EVERYDAY. WE TRUST IN HIS PRESENCE. WE CONNECT WITH IT. WE ARE LIFTED UP BY IT. WE PRAY FOR IT. WE CAN LIVE IN IT WHEN WE TURN OUR FAITH TO CHRIST'S EVER-VIGILANT PRESENCE ALL AROUND US AND WITHIN US.**

**WHEN WE FINALLY SEE THAT IN THE CASE OF JESUS, THAT IT IS GOOD TO BE A FOLLOWER, WE BEGIN TO REALIZE THAT IT IS THE TIME WE ARE OUR TRUE SELVES. IRONIC, ISN'T IT? WE FOLLOW ALL KIND OF THINGS IN THIS LIFE THAT ACTUALLY STRIP US OF OUR DIGNITY, AND YET WE BALK AT FOLLOWING CHRIST IN HIS CHURCH, SAYING THAT IT IS CONFORMITY. YET FOLLOWING JESUS, IS ACTUALLY THE ONLY PLACE WE LEARN TO BE R TRUE SELVES AND USE THE GIFTS WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN RIGHTLY.**

**THE CHALLENGE, HOWEVER FOR MOST CHRISTIANS IS NOT FOLLOWING JESUS. YOU CAN SEE THE GOOD OF THAT. MOST OF US HAVE BEEN TAUGHT THAT WELL. THE CHALLENGE FOR US IS RECOGNIZING HIS VOICE WITHIN THE THINGS WE SAY AND DO EACH DAY.**

**TO FOLLOW AND HEAR HIS VOICE IS TO THE BEST OF OUR ABILITY, TO BE CARING AND LOVING CHRISTIANS IN ALL OUR ENDEAVORS. WE ARE NOT CALLED TO BE HATERS OR AGGRESSIVE WARMONGERS. WE THINK PEOPLE ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN BEING CORRECT ABOUT THINGS. WE SEE HIS FACE IN ALL FACES. WE HEAR HIS VOICE IN ALL THE DECISIONS WE HAVE TO MAKE. AND EVEN WHEN THEY ARE DIFFICULT AND THE CHOICES ARE NOT SO GREAT, WE STILL APPEAL TO HIS GRACE AND FORGIVENESS.**

**JESUS SAYS: "MY FOLLOWERS KNOW MY VOICE AND I KNOW THEM. AND OUR GOAL IS TO BE ONE, AS I AND THE FATHER GOD ARE ONE." THIS IS THE SAVIOR'S WISH FOR US. SO WE FOLLOW. AMEN**