

Sermon- 10-4-2015

Text- John 10:1-15

Title- Living Fully (Reflect)

Reflect- is the title of our current teaching series. I enjoy it when we use words like this because it has several meanings. It has layers. When we *reflect* on something it means we look back or think deeply about it, that's one definition. Or, when we *reflect* it can mean that we are faithfully and accurately representing something, that's another definition. During this series, I hope come to find ourselves doing both. Dwelling on and thinking deeply about who we are as a church and as people, that's something worth reflecting on, and at the same time we are learning what it means to accurately represent the God who made us and loves us- we're learning to reflect Him.

I suppose you could say that the point of these messages is to draw our attention to the "heartbeat" of Harbor of Hope. Last week we learned that our mission is to Help People Find Their Way Back to God, and when we pursue that mission it's a reflection of God's heart for humanity. He's the God who seeks after us. He longs for people to find rest and restoration in Himself. He's like a shepherd looking for his lost sheep- and venturing off into the dark to bring it back safely; or a woman who's lost a valuable coin and scour the home until it is found. He is like a father searching for a wayward child, anxious to bring them home.

So when we- this collection of lost and wayward children who have been found and given hope by God- when we have opportunity to direct others to this hope, we share it. We open doors. We open arms so that others can come to know the joy we've found. We Help People Find Their Way Back to God, because we see the hope and transformation it's brought about in our own lives and we simply cannot help ourselves- we have to share it!

Now, if our mission as a body of believers is to Help People Find Their Way Back to God, then the question is, how do we go about it? How do we turn the mission into reality?

Around here we often describe a person "on mission" as someone who is Living Fully, Loving Deeply & Giving Freely. A person who embodies those characteristics- someone who is growing in these three areas- is a person who is reflecting the character and the heart of God. We throw that phrase around a lot (Live Fully, Love Deeply, Give Freely), so much so that it's easy to gloss over what each of those elements mean. So today we're going consider we're saying when we declare that we want to reflect God's heart by Living Fully.

So turn in your Bibles to the Gospel of John, chapter 10 and I'll read that for us.

1 "I tell you the truth, anyone who sneaks over the wall of a sheepfold, rather than going through the gate, must surely be a thief and a robber! **2** But the one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. **3** The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep recognize his voice and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. **4** After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they know his voice. **5** They won't follow a stranger; they will run from him because they don't know his voice."

6 Those who heard Jesus use this illustration didn't understand what he meant, **7** so he explained it to them: "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. **8** All who came before me were thieves and robbers. But the true sheep did not listen to them. **9** Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures. **10** The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.

11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. **12** A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don't belong to him and he isn't their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock. **13** The hired hand runs away because he's working only for the money and doesn't really care about the sheep.

14 "I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, **15** just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep.

In verse 10, Jesus says, "My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life." Or you could say He came to give us life and life to the full. So if our objective is to learn what it means to Live Fully, we've come to the right place. That's what Jesus is offering.

Of all the metaphors that Jesus could have chosen to illustrate "Life to the Full,"- of all the animals that he could have used (horses, or lions, or even camels, or chicken) He chose *SHEEP*! I would forgive you at this point if that leaves you scratching your head. It's a curious choice, in describing life to the full, for Jesus to use sheep. But there's reason for it. The most intimate and comprehensive of all the relationships between a master and an animal is that between a shepherd and his sheep. So Jesus is not so much telling us who *He* is (though He does that), or what He offers (though that too is significant), but with these verses Jesus gives us a great insight into how He feels about *us*, and why the role He plays in giving us "life and life to the full" is so crucial.

There are two important questions we should ask about this passage. 1. Why is it significant for Jesus to describe Himself as a shepherd? 2. What does it mean for you and me?

When Jesus describes himself as a shepherd it indicates several things. First it means that Jesus knows His sheep. **14** "I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, **15** just as my Father knows me and I know the Father.

Shepherds know their sheep in a way that would shock outsiders. It's fairly easy, when preparing to speak on one of the passages where Jesus talks about sheep, to find someone who wrote a book or taught a message on the subject having been a shepherd themselves. A man named Douglas MacMillan was a shepherd for 15 years before becoming a pastor and he wrote a book (*The Lord Our Shepherd*) in which he shares plenty of stories. In it, he remembers one day that he was on a train with a friend of his who was a shepherd. MacMillan had become a minister at this point, but he's traveling with this friend and three weeks before this shepherd had sold a number of his lambs. As the train was pulling out of the station they were going past a flock of sheep in a field that was a good deal away from the tracks and the shepherd turned to Douglas MacMillan and exclaimed, "Look, there's four of my lambs in there." And MacMillan didn't look at his friend and say, "Sure." He knew. Shepherds know their sheep. He spotted his four lambs in that flock.

Why does a shepherd have to know his sheep in a way that a horse owner does not? Why does a shepherd need that kind of absolute knowledge of his sheep? It's not a compliment. It's because sheep are incredibly helpless. In fact you let any other animal loose (dog, horse, cow, chicken) if you let any one of them loose they'll do one of two things: they'll either kick off their shoes and run barefoot through the grass singing "born free..." so happy that they're free to be wild again, or they'll make off for home. They'll either go wild or they'll make for home, but sheep don't do either.

MacMillan puts it this way, "Sheep are very stupid animals. Sheep follow each other and lose their direction in ways that cats and dogs do not. Even when you find them it's very difficult to round them up. Lost sheep roam to and fro in a panic." Sheep are slow, they're defenseless, they're weak, they're not nimble, and they are among the most helpless of all animals.

So what is Jesus' point? He saying that we are spiritually helpless, utterly un-self-sufficient, and in a spiritual sense, completely dependant. He's saying that the "Life to the Full," He is offering is not a self-sufficient life. It's an entirely dependant life. And I know that's difficult to hear. We all, I think, visualize *Living Fully* to mean that we're pursuing our goals and dreams individually- independently. Something about the word "*dependence*" is off-putting. And yet here Jesus would have us consider something about ourselves that is true, even if it's difficult for us to acknowledge. We're dependant people. We're continually over-estimating or under-estimating what we're capable of. So we're constantly making poor choices and bad decisions. The best way to illustrate this is this is when our present self looks back on our past self (say 10 years ago) and your present self thinks your past self was an idiot. Back then I didn't know what I know now. I didn't understand. I was naive. Clueless! The problem is, your future self (say 10 years from now), will also look back on your current self and say, "back then I was really in need of guidance." Back then I thought I understood but I was such a fool.

You know what this means, of course? It's what Jesus is describing. We're always a mess, but we always think we're just getting over it. That's the essence of a sheep.

Douglas MacMillan says that the thing that's so awful about sheep is not only do they get lost, but when you show up they just run to and fro. You can't even round them up. The sheep are lost, and the master shows up and what do they do? Are they excited to be found? No. They panic. They run around. You have to tackle them. We, like sheep are always going to need someone to help us, and even when the help arrives we will be convinced that we're just about to get over being a mess on our own. We are utterly dependant and we don't even recognize it.

To be dependant means we're completely reliant on someone or something besides ourselves. Our entire being is going to rest on something or someone. Whether it's the boss at our workplace or our parents or someone we hope to marry or our spouse, or even our children- we are all, like sheep, completely dependant on some shepherd.

Jesus says, not only that we're sheep, but that he knows us specifically- personally- individually- distinctly.

Remember when Jesus approached Nathaniel? He said, "I saw you underneath the fig tree." With the woman at the well, Jesus said, "I know you have had five husbands and the man you're with now is not one of them." Jesus comes to you and to me and says, "I have seen your misguided and foolish moves- every one of them. I have seen how insecure underneath you really are. I have seen beneath all of the swagger and bravado. I have observed you for who you are- and not only that but I've seen all the dumb things you're going to do next! The mistakes you'll make five years from now are known to me," Jesus says that He sees everything, all the way to our core.

He knows us, because we're His sheep and He is our shepherd.

Not only does He know us, but He lays down His life for us. This is amazing, especially in light of what we've just said. I remember a conversation in which the person I was speaking to said, "If my spouse knew the things that go on in my heart- they would leave me. If they knew my thoughts- they would leave."

There's not a minister anywhere on this continent or elsewhere, even the best ones, and I'll be real personal here for a moment- if you knew the thoughts in our head, if you knew the thoughts we had just during the week- you would never come back to hear another sermon. You wouldn't. But, you see, you know that's true of yourself too. We all know that if anybody really "knew" us all the way to our core, they would turn on us. You know that. I know that. And yet here's Jesus saying, "I know my sheep and I lay down my life for you."

He says that in verse **11** *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. 12 A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don't belong to him and he isn't their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock. 13 The hired hand runs away because he's working only for the money and doesn't really care about the sheep.*

One distinctive characteristic of sheep is that they're helpless, but do you know what the second thing is about sheep? From Jesus time, even to today, sheep are of great value. That's the reason why it wasn't so unusual for a shepherd who had 99 sheep (like we talked about last week) to go off in search of one that was lost. That's why it was not uncommon to have robbers and thieves come for the sheep. You know why- because every single part of the sheep is valuable.

Pound for pound sheep are the most valuable animal you can have. They have wool, then skin, and then the meat- every single part of the sheep is valuable. Shepherds don't have their money in a bank- when they raise sheep that is their treasure. That's where their worth and their wealth is.

So when Jesus contrasts himself with the hired hand, He points out that the hired hand is only in it for the money. What does Jesus say? Not so with me. Jesus actually goes beyond the normal limits of what a person would do.

Jesus says, when the wolves come, the people that are in it for the money run. Here Jesus breaks the boundaries of the metaphor. He says, "I love my sheep, so much, that when the wolves come I become a lamb myself." And when Jesus says, "I sacrifice my life for the sheep," that little word 'for'- you can't fully convey the meaning of that word in English. It's a particular Greek preposition that means: 'in the place of.'

Jesus is the shepherd that becomes a sacrificial lamb in our place. Do you understand what this means?

When it comes to our lives, our Good Shepherd loves us so much- He values us so much- that He would lose everything for us. He would lose His life. He would lose His glory- rather than seeing us perish.

There's never been a stronger statement of a person's value, right after the strongest statement of our foolishness. We're sheep- we're helpless. We're sheep- we're valued and prized by our Shepherd. If you are unwilling to see how foolish and dependant you are then you will never realize the how valuable you are to Jesus.

The poet Elizabeth Clephane describes it this way:

None of the ransomed ever knew

How deep were the waters crossed,

Or how dark the night that the Lord passed through

Ere He found the sheep that was lost.

Jesus knows us and He chooses to lay down His life for us, and it's because of this that we can live fully.

In verse 3 of our text, Jesus says, *"He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.*

4 After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they know his voice.

Western shepherds drive their sheep. They use dogs oftentimes to do it. But eastern shepherds lead their sheep. Jesus says, "He leads them out." "He walks ahead of them, and they follow him."

When you choose to follow Jesus He's right there with you. He doesn't give you a map and say, "off you go." In Romans 8:14 it says *"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God."* It doesn't say *some* of God's children are led. If we are following Christ, then we are led. So, no matter what you do, He is right there with you.

Do you want to experience life and life to the full? Do you want to Live Fully as a reflection of Christ? The way we do that is by following the lead of our Good Shepherd. We follow, and He leads us to good pastures where we can come and go freely.

How do we follow Him?

If Jesus is our shepherd then we have to follow Him completely. Comprehensively.

There isn't any area of your life that can be withheld from Him. The sheep needed a shepherd for every area of life. They needed the shepherd as physician. They needed him for provision. They needed him as protector. What does that mean?

Most of us come to Jesus because there's an area of our life that we want Him to come into and rearrange, but the rest is still ours. Sometimes we come to Him because our career is crumbling and we say, "come in here- but stay out of my love life." Or maybe you approached God because of your love life. And you said, "Come in and heal this area- but stay out of how I spend my money." But if we are sheep and Jesus is our Shepherd then we have to follow Him comprehensively- every area under His leading. Life to the full comes to us when we follow Jesus lead completely. Are you allowing Jesus to lead you in every area of you life?

To follow Him means that not only do we follow him completely, but we follow Him unconditionally. Are there conditions that you've placed around your willingness to let Jesus lead you?

Remember Douglas MacMillan's story about how you would have to go about getting a lost sheep? The trouble with lost sheep is not only that they get lost, but when you find them they don't eagerly return home with the shepherd. Listen to what MacMillan writes. "Even when you find (the sheep) it is very difficult to round it up. Lost sheep run to and fro in a panic. When you find it you must seize it, throw it to the ground, tie its fore legs and its hind legs together, and put it over your shoulders to get it home."

Our text last week was the section of scripture in Luke 15 where Jesus tells the story of the shepherd who went out to find the poor little lost lamb, and once he finds (remember) he puts it on his shoulders and brings it home rejoicing. Isn't that sweet? But you realize what he did to the sheep? He tackled it to the ground, bound up its legs and hefts it up on his shoulders- then he comes home rejoicing.

Consider what this means? Over and over again in our lives we face treatment that we consider too rough, don't we? Life conditions that are harsh and difficult arise and we might be tempted to think, "If I had a shepherd this wouldn't be happening to me." But Jesus says that we are sheep. Our understanding is very limited. So often, the loving thing that a shepherd has to do to a sheep in order to save its life, the sheep doesn't understand.

Some of you might be in exactly that position this minute, and Jesus says don't just follow me completely, follow me unconditionally. That means when it looks terrible; like it's not practical; it's confusing or even awful we have to follow Him. Because outside of the shepherd's care and provision we perish. Listen to Jesus. Trust Jesus. Stick with Him.

One final thing- we need to follow Jesus completely and unconditionally, but we also need to follow Him personally. The reason Jesus described the relationship he wants to have with you as that of a shepherd and his sheep is because He wants you to know him personally. He wants a relationship with you.

Psalm 23 reads (NKJV):

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He makes me to lie down in green pastures;

He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul;

He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil; For You are with me;

*Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever.*

The sheep has become a friend. Jesus is the shepherd who became a sheep so that His sheep could become His people. He wants relationship with us.

Talk to Him. Get beyond the superficial stuff (wants and needs). Get to the heart of things in your conversation. Tell Him how you feel and what you're thinking. Jesus wants relationship with you.