

Sunday's Sermon

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

250 Fox Hill Road ■ Hampton, Virginia 23669

April 21, 2024

The Reverend David E. Fox

Fourth Sunday of Easter (Year B) 2024

John 10.11-18

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

One of the most moving movies I think I have ever watched is *8 Seconds*. It's a movie about a cowboy named Lane Frost, a professional bull-rider, who was very popular in the eighties. The story focuses not on just Lane's career, but his friendship with Tuff Hedeman and the constant struggle for Lane to keep his marriage afloat. If you watched bull-riding in the eighties, then you are familiar with Lane's famous wave with both hands. Lane had hit the big leagues and at a young 24 years old, he became PRCA World Champion Bull Rider. In 1988, he rode bulls in the Olympics—the first time bull riding was an event. In 1989, at 26 years young, Lane had his last ride. He was riding a bull named Takin' Care of Business, and there in the arena Lane died.

His friend, Tuff, continued to ride; and the next year he was #4 in the PRCA World Championship. It came down to the last ride, where he declared that he was going to become the champion in honor of his friend, Lane Frost. This is where I find the movie to fall in the category of most moving. At that PRCA World Championship, Tuff rode his bull for eight seconds; but he didn't get off like all riders do. People thought he was hung up on the bull and couldn't get off, which is extremely dangerous; but that wasn't the case. He wasn't finished. Tuff was riding eight more seconds for his friend Lane. And so 16 seconds later he hops off to learn that he was now the new PRCA World Champion Bull Rider, and with a bow and a Lane-like wave, he had done an amazing tribute for his deceased friend. That is one of the most emotional two minutes of a movie I have ever watched.

Tuff was not finished after eight seconds of riding, there was more work to do. And brothers and sisters, the message I bring to you today is that God is not finished; there is still more work to do.

The Fourth Sunday of Easter is always given the name "Good Shepherd Sunday," because we always have a reading from John 10 about Jesus being the Good Shepherd, though each reading in our three-year rotation is different excerpts from the chapter. And when you preach on a reading as often as we do for John 10, it can become old hat, or feel as if there is nothing new that we can bring to the table, so today I want to focus on a piece of the text that I have given very little thought to in the past. From verse 16: "I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd." This passage is telling us that Jesus isn't finished; there is still more work to do.

Dr. Lose, former President of the Lutheran Theological Seminary – Philadelphia, says there are three reasons why the fact God isn't finished matters. *“First, God continues to call people from all walks of life, from every nation on the face of the earth, and from each and every generation across the two-thousand-plus years since Jesus first uttered those words until today... Second, God is at work in our midst and through us... to extend the invitation to abundant life offered by the Good Shepherd... Third, the members who will one day constitute Jesus' flock are beyond our imagining. There is a tremendous expansiveness to Jesus' statement here and we do not know – for neither Jesus nor John tells us – just what are the limits of the fold Jesus describes. All we know is that Jesus – and therefore God – isn't [finished]. Jesus is still calling, God is still searching, and in time we will all be, as Jesus says, one flock under one shepherd.”*

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is still at work; Jesus is not finished; there is still more work to be done. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, didn't finish his work on the cross. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, didn't finish his work by having 12 disciples. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, didn't finish his work by only feeding, healing, and teaching in the stories we hear in the Bible. Brothers and sisters, the Good News is that Jesus the Good Shepherd is not finished; there is still more work to be done.

So, you may be thinking, “Pastor Dave, what work is Jesus doing in our lives today?” Well, I'm glad that you asked. Our Triune God is actively at work today in and through us, all of us, every single one of us, all of us put together. God, the Father is calling us sheep to gather in this place to worship God, to receive God's gifts of grace and forgiveness, to hear God's Word. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is calling us sheep to be his hands and feet and to share the Good News of what he is doing in our lives. The Holy Spirit is empowering us to go out and evangelize to those in our community, to reach out to our neighbors and invite them to experience the love of God in Jesus Christ for themselves.

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, continues to gather his flock, and we as God's children, as sheep of Jesus' flock, are to help in this goal of gathering up those who do not belong to the Good Shepherd's flock. Christ's work is not finished; it continues through his gathering of the lost and forsaken, the blind and the lame, the rich and the haughty, the proud and the strong. Christ is at work in and through each and every one of us, to gather into the sheep pen, all in Hampton Roads, the rich, the poor, the minorities, the majorities, the educated, the illiterate, the democrats, the republicans, the successful, the jobless, the hopeless, the helpless, the loveless, the families, the widows, the single, the orphaned.

This flock that we are a part of, is one that has the Good Shepherd for a shepherd, but it is not a flock that does not experience the pain and reality of life. *“Jesus presented Himself as both sheep [the paschal lamb] and shepherd, the good shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep... The sheep now have a good shepherd who feeds them and does not slaughter them. The sheep now have a good shepherd who is one of them and understands them as one of them. The sheep have a good shepherd who covers up all their spots and blemishes and presents them spotless and blameless”*.ⁱⁱ The Good Shepherd knows the pains and sorrows of life.

God's people are not perfect, but we have a Savior who is. We are a flock that from time to time gets bit by fellow sheep. We are a flock that likes the comfort of things staying the same. We are a flock that does not willingly reach out and tell others about what great a shepherd we do have.

We are a flock that experiences loss and struggle through death, divorce, cancer and other illnesses, job loss, depression, and guilt. And though we are a flock that goes through the ups and downs and loopy-loops of life, we have the Good Shepherd, who is at work, who is not finished, who still has work to do.

This is what we sheep are called to be a part of, to know that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is with us every step of the way through this life, and to then share that story of how Jesus has walked beside us through it all: through the graduation, through the death, through the advancement, through the struggle. It's those stories told of God at work in our lives that will draw others in to experience an abundant life in Christ. It is our Triune God working in and through us each day that is drawing others in to experience life more abundantly.

So, sheep of the Good Shepherd, we are gathered here to be nourished by God's Word, God's Holy Meal, and God's Holy People. We are now being called by the Good Shepherd to go out and share the Good News so that no longer are there those who don't belong, but a place where ALL belong. It's time to stop riding the bull for ourselves, it's time to stop living life for ourselves. Let's make the rest of this ride all about the Good Shepherd and his love for all of creation, especially his love for all of those sheep, both in the pen and out.

ⁱ Lose, David. Dear Partner in Preaching: Easter 4 B: God is Not Done Yet! 4/23/2015.
<http://www.davidlose.net/2015/04/easter-4-b-god-is-not-done-yet/>

ⁱⁱ Sweet, Leonard and Viola, Frank. Jesus: A Theogrophy. Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN. 2012. p.65-66