

There's a story about the great scientist, Albert Einstein... He was on a train going out of town to give a speech...Like many of us brilliant minds, Dr. Einstein was somewhat absent-minded,.. So when the train conductor came to punch his ticket,...he was very embarrassed as he dug thru his pockets & briefcase but couldn't find the ticket...The conductor said, "We all know who you are, Dr. Einstein....I'm sure U bought a ticket,...don't worry abt it."...The conductor continued down the aisle punching tickets. ...But before he moved to the next car, he looked back & saw that Dr. Einstein was down on his hands & knees looking under his seat searching for his ticket...The conductor walked back to him & said: "Dr. Einstein,...please don't worry about it.It's ok. I know you bought a ticket."...Dr. Einstein looked up from the floor & said, "I too know that I bought a ticket. What I don't know is where the ticket says I am going!"

Have you ever had a time in your life when you didn't quite know where you were going,...when you were not sure where your life was heading?...I've been there...During times like that we need some guidance, ... someone to help us choose the right path to follow...Because, on our own, we won't always make the best choice. ...But, you know, we are so lucky... We have a Lord who loves us too much to leave us to find our own way. .. As we just heard in the beautiful 23rd psalm, .. He is our shepherd who "guides us in right paths"...especially when we R like wandering, lost sheep.

Like in today's Gospel...Jesus & His disciples needed a rest from all of the preaching & healing they had been doing among the people...& so they stole away in a boat to a quiet, deserted place across the lake...But when they got there, instead of peace & quiet,...they found a mob of needy people who had run around the lake, were there waiting for them...What does Jesus do? Does He get angry like you & I would:..."What are you doing here?...Come on, give us a break."...Does He send the people away? ..."Get outta here...Leave us alone!"...No. Mark tells us that when Jesus saw that crowd, "His heart was moved with compassion, because they were like sheep without a shepherd."...Jesus looked at them & saw people who were like lost sheep wandering in the wilderness, desperate for a shepherd to guide them,...& the Gospel says, "He began to teach them many things."

You know what? It's no different today than it was 2000 years ago....Jesus looks at the world today & sees many of us – young & old – who at times in our life are like wandering, lost sheep, not sure where we are going,...not sure of what to do,...not sure who or what we should follow. ...That's when we need a compassionate, caring shepherd to guide us on the right path...Well, the Good News is...We've got one!...Jesus Christ...He calls Himself the **GOOD** Shepherd! ...Listen to what He says in Chapter 10 of John's Gospel:

"I am the Good Shepherd... I know My sheep, and they know Me...They hear My voice & they follow Me.

I give them eternal life, and no one shall snatch them out of My hand....

I am the Good Shepherd who lays down His life 4 His sheep...

Now, that's a shepherd we can count on...He's given His life for every one of His precious sheep. ...I love where He says "No one will snatch my sheep out of my hand."....He won't let any of His sheep be snatched away by those false shepherds – those tools of Satan - who never give up trying to lead us down the wrong path...In our 1st reading, the prophet Jeremiah tells us of God's anger at the false shepherds who were leading His people astray: "Woe to the shepherds who mislead & scatter my flock...I will punish their deeds." ...And if we do fall prey to one of those false shepherds, & get lost...our Good Shepherd won't stop looking for us.

You remember the Parable of the lost sheep...In that parable, Jesus assures us that He will never give up searching for the one sheep who has gone astray...the misguide, confused...lost sheep. ...He will leave the rest of His flock and keep searching for the one who is lost until He finds him & brings him home...We are never so lost that He will give up on us; never so lost that He says, "Nah, he's not worth it," or "Nah, she's not worth it."

Now we shouldn't think that the only way we can become one of the Good Shepherd's lost sheep is by falling into a sinful way of life...That's one way we can be lost,...but there are a lot of other ways...We can be lost in our fears and anxieties about what tomorrow may bring...Or lost in our grief when we lose a loved one, unable to get thru a day without the pain & the tears. ...We can be lost in despair over a bad situation that isn't getting better: "Ah, it's hopeless, nothing's gonna change."

We can be so lost in our anger at some person or some situation that we can't think or act rationally.We can be lost in self-hatred, feeling that we are not worth anything to anyone. ...We can be lost in the grip of an addiction...or a bad disease...We can be lost in the darkness of depression to the point where we can barely function...We can be lost in so many ways that distance us from God, that make us feel that God doesn't care or that maybe there is no God. ...Of course, we'd be wrong. . There is a God...& God does care.

We can never be so lost that the Good Shepherd cannot find us...We need to listen for His voice calling us back to that good place....& not the voices of Satan's false shepherds calling us to that bad place....

My Friends, there will be times in your life wen you feel lost...or you will be worried about someone you love being hopelessly lost ,...During those times, I want you to remember this true story I am about 2 tell you...You may have heard me tell it before, but it's a story we need to hear over & over.

Some years ago, a seminary classmate of mine – Deacon Greg Sampson – told me about an experience that happened while he served as a deacon intern at a hospital. in Washington, DC. ...that was run by the religious order of nuns founded by Mother Teresa...The hospital was primarily for the care of AIDS patients in the terminal stages of their disease...In the time he spent there,... Greg had witnessed a number of agonizing deaths,...but there was one patient - a young man - whose death made an especially deep impression on him...This patient had contracted AIDS because of a reckless & promiscuous life-style....He was a baptized Christian, but he wanted nothing to do with religion or prayers...& so every time the missionary sisters offered to pray with him, he became furious & threw them out of his room.

As his condition got worse, ... his emaciated body became covered with sores & racked with pain, ...& the suffering man grew even more belligerent.... He would curse & swear at the nuns or Greg whenever they tried to tell him about the saving love of Jesus, or began to read to him from the Bible.... As far as he was concerned, he had made a terrible mess of his life,... & God had no use for him & he had no use for God...if there even was a God.

When the patient lapsed into a coma, the nuns and Greg brought candles & a crucifix into his dark room & began to pray over him. ...When his breathing became more labored, & the end was near...one of the sisters held the cross over his head, and - as Greg described it - the light from the candles cast the shadow of the crucifix across the dying man's face.....The sisters & Greg continued to pray... A few more minutes passed, & then suddenly the man's eyes opened wide,... and he found himself staring into the face of the suffering Jesus.Then, drawing on

his last ounce of energy,.. he reached up & grabbed the cross,..clutched it to his breast, and with one final breath, uttered his last words, "My Lord and my God."

The Good Shepherd had found His lost sheep....And He brought him home. AMEN.