

SERMON – “Held In God’s Hands” April 25, 2010 Text:
Psalm 23 & John 10:22-30

All of us know the importance of the word “trust” and “security”. We want to trust in something that will make us feel secure about our future. We use to refer to the stocks and bonds as something that would secure our financial future. But we have found that we can’t trust them for human greed can inflate the value and leave many hard working people with empty pockets. Our houses and sadly even our churches today need to have security systems that we trust to keep our belongings, and ourselves safe from intruders. As we have found out they are not fool proof, when Rex, our janitor, was attacked several years ago within our building. Many youth have lost trust in so-called friends when they betray them for more popular friends. Many have trusted spouses to love and care for them only to learn their love was fleeting, and they caused us harm physically, emotionally, and mentally. For many hard working Americans we have learned during this recession that we cannot trust the company we work for to take care of us, even when we have been a faithful employee for over 20 years. And many of us have lost trust in our Social Security in making our retirement financially secure.

So what can we trust in to give us security for our future? What can the church offer to people so caught up in putting their trust in the material and personal securities of today? We can offer them the trusting hands of God. We can help them transfer the trust in the securities of humans to the divine security of God’s love and care.

In order for us to realize anew our trust in God's secure hands even when everything else seems to fail, let us explore our morning's text of 23 Psalm and John 10:27-30.

Both texts use the metaphor of the shepherd as describing the never ceasing love and care of God that we can trust our lives in. To help us understand our trust in God's hands it will be helpful to understand more about shepherding and the relationship they have with their sheep.

The shepherd's job was to provide the essentials of life to their flock. They were to lead them to green pastures so that they would be well fed. Sheep will eat to bare dirt and they will not leave that pasture to go a greener pasture. They depend on following the shepherd to lead them to nourishment, for they cannot do this themselves.

The shepherd leads them to places of quiet water where the sheep can drink safely. You see sheep 's nose and mouth are so close together that they need calm waters to drink from. They are also not good swimmers and if they fell in water the heavy wet wool would drown them. Sheep need a quiet lake or pond waters to drink safely from.

The shepherd was to provide areas where the sheep could rest. In fact many times the shepherd had to force the sheep to stop and lie down so that the sheep would not over extend themselves and risk exhaustion and even death.

Finally the shepherd had to protect the sheep from predators, especially at night. With the rod and staff the shepherds would lead the sheep down the right

and safest paths. Indeed sheep totally trusted their shepherd for their security and livelihood.

The relationship of trust was so powerful between the shepherd and sheep, the shepherd could walk right through a sleeping flock without disturbing a single one, while a stranger could not step in the fold without causing pandemonium. Sheep considered the shepherds as part of their family, and the relationship grows between the two quite exclusively. They develop a language of their own that outsiders are not privy to. A good shepherd learns to distinguish a bleat of pain from one of pleasure, while the sheep learns that a cluck of the tongue means food, or a two-note song means that it is time to go home. If the flock intermingled with many other flocks at the watering hole, all the shepherds had to do was to use a special call and all the flock would gather around the right shepherd. Such an intimate relationship between the shepherd and his/her sheep that the sheep knew the hand that held their life.

Knowing this now let us turn to the scriptures and learn more about the trust and security that is offered us in our God through Jesus Christ our Shepherd.

We learn that our great shepherd feeds us. Jesus feeds us with his body and his blood that gives us strength to face what life throws our way. When we partake of our Lord's Supper we eat with him and remember his sacrifice that was made for us. The bread and juice that we eat and drink are the green pastures that we NEED to eat. Without God our Shepherd, we will choose to eat of things that will not nourish us, material possessions, prestige, competition,

fame, popularity, and recognition to name a few. These foods leave us forever hungry and thirsty leaving us unsatisfied, still starving for life.

Our God through Jesus Christ leads us to still life giving waters. In baptism we are cleansed, nurtured, and revived in Christ. Water can drown but in our baptism waters we are giving life and our spiritual thirst is quenched. In baptism we belong to God through Jesus Christ. As we touch the waters as we enter worship we are reminded that we belong to God forever. No one can grab us out of God's hands.

God through Jesus Christ, our Great Shepherd, gives us rest for our souls. Remember Jesus words "Come to me all who are heavily burdened and I will give you rest." We can come to our Shepherd, the one who knows our voice, and unload our burdens of life. We can find rest in simply being who we are before our God. We don't have to pretend to be joyful when we are sad, brave we are afraid, and forgiving when we are angry for our Shepherd knows us intimately. He knows every mark and characteristic that makes us who we are, and treasures them. We can rest knowing that Jesus loves us totally knowing all about who we are.

God through Jesus Christ our Great Shepherd protects us from the effects of evil. Through Jesus death and resurrection, death no longer has the last say and sin no longer has its sting. Yes, we will face evil in the world, yes we will face wrong doings in ourselves and be hurt by others, but listen to this carefully. Evil and sin have lost the battle, so their effects on us are temporary, not eternal. God's love will win. When we face death in relationships with friends or loved

ones, career, and even face our own death, we don't have to face it in fear, for Christ defeated death by rising from the grave. As we believe and follow Jesus we will have eternal life with Him and with those who believe and follow him as well. We maybe separated physically from our loved ones but it is temporary, we are forever held in the hands of our Shepherd. Nothing, not even death can separate us from him.

We may wonder down wrong pathways and get lost, we may have doubts about Jesus as our Shepherd, life may seem especially dark and no help seems to bring light. But remember we have heard our Shepherd's voice of love in Jesus Christ. These are Jesus words to us in John 10:27 "My sheep hear my voice. And they follow me." Hear his voice? You are loved. You are valued. He calls you now to believe and follow with your life in his way. Nothing can take us out of the loving caring hands of our Shepherd. This we can trust.

We personally, and as a church community, have faced and will face again insecure times. Let us take hope in that God does not depend on us to have the perfect life, the best bodies, or successful careers, or many church programs to extend grace and include us in the flock. God just does. Trust in the love our great Shepherd. This is where our security for eternal life lies. But some of you may be asking; how can we trust in God's security when everything we see cannot be trusted to last? Well listen to these words by Paul in Romans: "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loves us. For I am convinced that

neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Take comfort my friends and offer this comfort to those around you who are facing insecure time. We are held tightly in our Lord's hands. No one or anything can remove us whom his grip. Thanks be to God. Let us pray.