

"Jesus Is the GOAT"

Text: John 10:11-16

4/15/2018

I don't know if you've noticed it, but there seems to be a fascination in today's generation with deciding what the "greatest of all time" is. It doesn't matter whether you're talking about sports, movies, musicians, whatever - people today seem to be determined to determine who was the greatest. They even have a term for it: GOAT, which is an acronym for "Greatest Of All Time." I refuse to do it, because I don't think there ever is such a thing (as one, single greatest).

To be sure, such conversations are fun, so I'll play along, but only to the point of having a "GOAT list," a short list of things/people that could be considered the GOAT. You can have a "GOAT list," but you can never have a GOAT. You know why? Because nobody is perfect. Everything is flawed. There's always room for improvement.

Until you come to Jesus of Nazareth. There's no room for improvement there. Nothing about Him was flawed. He was, and still is, perfect. Unlike anyone or anything else, Jesus is the GOAT. We see that in today's Gospel, to which we now turn our attention ...

As we do, we listen again to a portion of our Gospel lesson for today, from John 10:

"I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away ... The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the Good Shepherd; .. I lay down My life for the sheep."(John 10:11-15)

Jesus speaks there about His care for us. He says that He is our Shepherd, that we are His sheep, and that He laid down His life for us - again:

"The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep."(v.11)

I mentioned at the beginning the idea of having a "GOAT list," and one of the movies on my "GOAT list" is the 1959 version of "Ben-Hur." At the end of that film, the very last shot in fact, we're shown three crosses on a hill side in the background, and in the foreground walks a shepherd with his sheep from one side of the screen to the other. That's the very last thing you see when you watch "Ben-Hur," and there hasn't been a year when we've watched it in our home that I haven't said at that scene "The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep" (I think my kids think that's just part of the dialogue in the movie, 'cause they hear it every year). That's today's Gospel: John 10:11, where Jesus says that He cares about us sinners.

The illustration of a shepherd provides an effective way to talk about that, and John uses an entire chapter of his Gospel to do that. In Jesus' day shepherding was a common trade, and to a shepherd, his flock of sheep meant everything. It wasn't common to butcher sheep for their meat; sheep were used for their woolen coats. You'd trim their coat every year or so and sell it for wool, which meant you kept the sheep over the long haul. Sheep were the livelihood of a shepherd.

But not so with a hired-hand, the one whom the shepherd might have had on payroll to help out with the odds-and-ends of the job. The sheep weren't his livelihood. Should a wolf or some other wild animal come upon the flock, those sheep were on their own. They didn't mean enough to the hired-hand for him to risk his life for them; he'd tum tail and run away every time. Not-so the shepherd. Again, those sheep were important; they were his livelihood; he'd fight for them, doing anything necessary to protect them.³

The shepherd got to know his sheep, too; and they knew him. Jesus even says earlier in the first part of this illustration:

"... the sheep follow him because they know his voice."(v.4)

There are stories from the ancient world where shepherds would sort their sheep by simply calling them. Evidently a shepherd had a call which was unique, and peculiar to his own flock. A shepherd's call was so unique, he could mingle his flock with that of another shepherd's, and then sort them - NOT by picking them out one by one, but again, by simply calling them. The sheep would recognize their shepherd's voice and go right to him.

The same thing happens with people. You see, right before Jesus told this illustration of the "Good Shepherd," He had given sight to a blind man. He had done it on a Sabbath, which, of course, had the religious leaders all in a tizzy because Jesus hadn't observed the Sabbath Law of rest. The whole incident got the man into trouble with the authorities of the local synagogue, as they tracked him down and tried to coerce him into incriminating Jesus by means of some kind of damaging testimony. But the man wouldn't play along, saying only:

"If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing (i.e., He could not have given me my sight)."(9:33)

They responded:

"You were born entirely in sins, and are you teaching us?"

Then John writes that: "They put him out (of the synagogue)."(9:34)

The leaders of the synagogue didn't know the Good Shepherd. But the man did. John writes that:

"Jesus heard they had put him out, and finding him, He said: 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' ... He said: 'Lord, I believe.' And he worshiped Him."(9:35, 38)

More than just the man's eyes were opened; his heart was opened, "seeing" Jesus with the "eyes" of faith. The man knew his Shepherd because his Shepherd knew him, as John writes in today's Gospel:

"I know My own, and My own know Me, ... "(John 10:14) Jesus' knowing the man led to the man knowing Jesus, and knowing Jesus, my friends, makes all the difference; it makes all the difference because Jesus is the GOAT (i.e., He's the Greatest Of All Time).

We see that from the verses in John immediately following those of today's Gospel, where Jesus says this:

" .. I lay down My life ... No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again." (vs.17b-18)

We're in the midst of the season of Easter; not only that, but Easter is what we celebrate every time we get together, every Sunday throughout the year - every Sunday is an Easter Sunday! And why is that? Because with His resurrection from the dead, Jesus has proven once and for all that He has power over life and even death! On Easter morning Jesus proved that He had authority to lay down His life, and authority to take His life up again! That's as good, that's as great, as it gets.

Folks, in all of recorded human history, no one has ever done what Jesus did: no one has risen again from the dead and then lived forever. There were a couple instances in the O.T. where people were raised from the dead, and in the N.T. there are some instances as well, but those people all died again. Only Jesus of Nazareth, in all of recorded history, died and lived to tell about it. Only Jesus of Nazareth died and then rose again to say:

"Ha! Death can't hold Me! Death can't have Me! (in words from John's Gospel, ch.14 & 11) I am the way, the truth, and the LIFE! ... I am the resurrection and the LIFE! He who lives and believes in Me, even though he die, yet shall he live, and he who lives and believes in Me shall never die."

Only Jesus can say that. Jesus says that, even after having died, because He rose again to live forever! Again, Jesus has power over life and even death, and that makes Him the "Greatest Of All Time." Jesus is the GOAT. I know this is "Good Shepherd Sunday," and here we are talking about goats, but that's what Jesus is: Jesus is the GOAT. Jesus is the "Greatest Of All Time."

And as we said at the beginning, Jesus cares about us, which makes Him even greater still. All the others on those "GOAT lists," they couldn't care less about you and me. But Jesus does care. Folks, Jesus cared so much about you that He went to a cross for you, and then with His resurrection He rose to provide for your every need - even the need of knowing that, after you die, you won't end, but you'll live on forever with Him. Just as the flock of a shepherd meant

everything to the shepherd, so too do you mean everything to your Lord Jesus, the Good (Great?) Shepherd. As Jesus Himself says in John, in words we quoted earlier, again:

" .. I lay down My life ... No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again."

Jesus laid down His life, and then took it up again, for the blind man. Jesus laid down His life, and then took it up again, for you and me. Jesus laid down His life and then took it up again to conquer death for all. It doesn't get any better than that; it doesn't get any greater; it doesn't get any greater than Jesus.

And with that we return to where we began, where we said that there is no such thing as a GOAT / a "Greatest Of All Time," not unless you're talking about Jesus. The message we take with us on this "Good Shepherd Sunday" is that Jesus is the GOAT; He's the greatest; nobody but nothing can match His power over life and death, and the fact that He uses that power to care for us. To the blessing of every one of us here today, Jesus is the GOAT –

- In His ✝ Name,

Amen!