John 10:11 I am the good Shepherd.

 I don’t know about you, but whenever I hear about Jesus as our Good Shepherd I am just a little bit at a loss. I say that because although I can read about what a shepherd was all about in Biblical days or even what a shepherd was like in the early years of our country, but not having ever really experienced the shepherd’s life or seen the interactions of shepherd and sheep I feel I do not fully appreciate and grasp what a good shepherd is all about. So basically when it comes down to good shepherds, I have to go on what my experiences and perceptions are.

 My first experience with Jesus as the Good Shepherd came from Dunmeyer Lutheran Church of Elton, PA. That church was the home of the extended family of my Mother, which is my way of telling you that pretty much every member of that Church was somehow, in some way, related to my Mother and her family. Because it was the “family” congregation, my oldest sisters and I were all taken there to be baptized into the kingdom of God. And if you went and visited with Grandma and Grandpa, you were going to go to church there.

 The Church itself was a little old building, much like St. Paul’s original Church was before your numerous renovations and improvements…except I do think the other church was smaller. It seemed that no matter where you sat, you were pretty close to the altar, but that might just be the faulty remembrance of a little boy. What I do remember is that behind the altar, in a wonderful and awesome painting there was Jesus the Good Shepherd. I am sure you have seen that painting. Jesus standing in the pasture with sheep in the background, sheep by his side, a little lamp in his arms and that shepherd’s staff in his hand. The picture was life size and I was little and it seemed to me that Jesus just loomed over the whole room.

 Yep, that was my first encounter with Jesus the good shepherd. I don’t know how many times I went to church there before that painting caught my eye and captured my thoughts, but it did. Here are things that I remember understanding about Jesus as I gazed at that picture. First, I knew Jesus was awesome. That picture was surrounded by red drapery and there was Jesus all in white and you just knew that Jesus was awesome. As you looked at that lamb in his arms, you could sense his kindness and loving compassion, not to mention that the sheep standing at his feet were also looking at him because I think they knew just how wonderful Jesus is. As you looked at the sheep you could see they were well fed and cared for…well, I just kind of figured that those sheep were happy and content because the joy of having Jesus there for them just oozed out of the picture. And although the picture was of Jesus the Good Shepherd, that picture still captured the glory, the awe and majesty of Jesus and you knew (maybe it was the shepherd’s staff) that you shouldn’t mess around with Jesus. That’s my first encounter with Jesus the Good Shepherd.

 By the way, sadly, that little church was burned to the ground. Arson. Foolish kids playing around. I remember that because it just so happened that when it burned down I was at Grandma and Grandpa’s house. I don’t remember if the whole family was there or if I was spending the summer there, but I was there when that church was torched. I remember going up and from a distance watching it burn. It was a sad day.

 From that point on my encounters with Jesus as the Good Shepherd came from my study and learning in the Word of God. So let me continue to tell you what I have learned of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. That will be our theme: **JESUS, THE GOOD SHEPHERD.**

 Now one thing that that picture of Jesus I described for you also impressed me with was the fact that Jesus was a leader. I don’t know exactly what in the picture evoked that reality but it is clearly something that God’s Word has brought me to realize all the more. Jesus is a leader, a strong, capable, and loving leader. Actually if you just think about it, to be a shepherd is to be a leader. So how does Jesus lead us today as our Shepherd?

 The first thing I can tell you is that Jesus leads us by and through his Word. Jesus is that Word, which is the very embodiment of His glory and honor. Jesus gives us every bit of information and wisdom that we need to know in order to be his children, the sheep of his pasture. I find comfort in that. Comfort because the Word of God is sure and certain. It is written clearly and precisely so that there is no doubt as to what God is revealing and what God is up to. I just don’t understand people who want to pick apart the Word of God, who want to cast doubt on its marvel and wisdom. Because here is the thing, without the Word of God, without its sureness and revelation how would you ever know anything about God or Jesus or even Jesus the Good Shepherd? And if the Bible is not the Word of God, pure, holy, true and without lie or falsehood in any way, then why would anyone care? Why not put your faith in Grimm’s Fairy Tales or perhaps in the adventures of Hercules or….oh, yeah, people do do that, don’t they! They trash the Word of God and then they wonder why their faith is worthless and useless to them. No, Jesus the Good Shepherd leads us, leads us by and through his Holy Word.

 And what does the Word lead to? We learn to know the Father in the Word. Of course, the Word says that to know Jesus is to know the Father. They are one in a wonderful and unique way. We learn of the Father’s love and plan for the world He created, a world destroyed by the ravages of sin when our first parents disobeyed God and ate of the forbidden fruit. That’s caused lots of problems since. Yet God the Father, in his love, planned for our salvation, carried out that plan and brought us Jesus.

 The Word of God also leads us to know Jesus. We learn of his love and compassion: that the Savior Jesus laid down his life for us. Yep, the shepherd giving his life for the sheep! And as we grasp all of the wonder of Jesus we realize that the Word then leads us to faith in Jesus and what He came to do. How he came to be our Good Shepherd, our perfect Shepherd, who grants and gives us the precious gift of faith.

 Grasp that! Jesus our Good Shepherd leads us to faith. He brings us to see the horror of sin and its need to be atoned for. He directs us to contemplate his sacrificial death on our behalf, yes, how He paid for our sins on the cross just because of His love. And with that he brings to our hearts the victorious nature of Easter morning. He lives. Our sins are paid for. We have a Savior. We know the truth of God. We know the depth of God’s love in sending His Son and we know the depth of Jesus’s love as He atoned for us and then rose from the dead so that we could be absolutely sure that everything revealed in His Word is true and certain. Do you get the feeling that Jesus is indeed the Good Shepherd? All of this and more revealed and sealed in God’s Word, the very pasture Jesus leads us on and feeds us with.

 There is more. Do you remember that I mentioned the lamb in Jesus’ arms and also the sheep at his side gazing up at him? What that painting hinted at is so very true. Jesus our Good Shepherd cares for us. Now, please, don’t buy the garbage many churches like to thrown your way in this endeavor. When we talk about the care of Jesus we are not going to insist that life be rosy and wonderful, that as a child of God you get only the best of the best and nothing bad will ever happen to you. We are not going to lie to you and tell you that if you aren’t prospering and giddily happy then you can’t be a child of God. No, what I will tell you is what God says. He cares for you. He most cares for your spiritual health and well-being.

 That means that God is going to tell you about and reveal the sin in this world and your life. He is going to condemn that sin and tell you to stop. But God is not an angry and punishing God, not to us, but He was that to Jesus on the cross! He was that to Jesus for our sake, because he cares for our souls. So Jesus paid for our sins. Jesus offers us forgiveness and hope, grace and eternal life. Jesus with compassion and care calls you to him, reveals the truth and grants the power and wonder of faith in Him. Truth is, we sin daily and greatly and yet Jesus forgives. He forgives because He died on the cross for us. And when that message of Jesus penetrates our thick skulls and dead hearts, it changes us. It makes us alive and wise. Jesus leads us to hate sin and desire lives pleasing to Him…not because we have to but because we want to…that’s the impact of looking what He did for us? Jesus the Good Shepherd took every care to deliver our souls from sin, death and the Devil. And the fact that He lives is all the proof that we need.

 But Jesus also cares about our lives: about us personally. As you study God’s Word you realize that God knows who you are and has ever since he planned His creation. He knows your troubles, cares, woes, joys, victories, struggles, foibles and short-comings. He knows our hearts and needs. He knows exactly what we need and how to bring whatever is necessary to our lives that we seek him and get filled with His wonder. I can’t help it if the world causes you to doubt him or if your troubles, caused by sin, lead you to be angry and hateful to God, because He is not. That Good Shepherd only acts and moves in your life for your eternal good and salvation! Just because YOU can’t see his LOVE working for you does not mean it isn’t there! Jesus has given us His Word and His promises. He tells us He is always with us! He says He makes everything work for our good and salvation.

 So, yeah, maybe there is some hardship or grief…but trust that God is working for your eternal life and salvation. Or maybe, there is nothing but good going on…and still recognize that God is working for your eternal life and salvation. It is what the Good Shepherd does.

 It is what He does because He is Our Good Shepherd. He is not some nameless, made-up, pretend being. He is real and true, living and eternal. He is the One true God, the only God and He has been acting, moving, planning and guiding the world and your life for His eternal purpose and marvel. Now I realize that the bent of the world today is to deny him, ignore him and increasingly to attack those who believe in him. Don’t panic. God knows what He is doing. He has proven He knows. He set forth his plans and brought them to be. He brought forth nations and peoples and histories and His Word predates many of them and what they would do and be. Yet that is the point. God brought them forth just as He had said and God worked that His will be done. Done for our good and salvation.

 So…His will was to give us a good shepherd. His will is to grant us the wonder and marvel of Jesus. To help us see how that shepherd cared for and laid down his life for the flock, and was raised again to be put over all things. To help us see how that shepherd leads us by and through His Word, the revelation of everything. To help us have and be a part of His kingdom of faith, faith that is about Him and His marvel and not about us. Our shepherd cares for us, yes, guides and directs our lives to our eternal good and salvation. He never lets us down, because he is the Good Shepherd.

 My prayer for you is that you continue to follow this Good Shepherd. Continue to be the humble sheep of his fold. Sheep with sins forgiven and lives blessed with eternity. Hear His voice. Trust His Way. Know that he is Our Good Shepherd. Amen.