

April 2 Adult Spiritual Growth Class Synopsis

Let There Be Light: A Study of FPC Stained-Glass Windows – Christ The Good Shepherd

First Presbyterian Church has been blessed with parishioner memorial gifts of 15 beautiful stained-glass windows over the years, as summarized in the wonderful guide put together by Virginia Wiley in 1990, as part of the 175 year anniversary celebration of the church. The window of focus is Christ the Good Shepherd, located in the Narthex, in the right west wall.

The window is one of five that were moved from our former church on Ninth and Court Streets, which was dedicated on May 8, 1900. The window depicts Christ as the Good Shepherd as shared in John 10:14: *“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.”* Jesus is shown robed in red and green, symbolizing His suffering and sacrifice and the eternal life that He gives in our faith in Him. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is carrying a small lamb in one hand and a shepherd’s crook in the other as the lamb’s mother anxiously trots alongside Jesus, with the flock following. Of note is the flock that consists of both white and black sheep, signifying believing Jews and Gentiles with Christ’s words in John 10:16: *“And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.”* The backdrop of the sky has the appearance of an approaching storm as in Ezekiel 34:12: *I will be like a shepherd looking for his scattered flock. I will find my sheep and rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on that dark and cloudy day.* The window border is symmetric to that of the Narthex window of Mary at the Tomb. The scene is framed by a white arch and pillars, possibly signifying ‘the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of truth’ as expressed in 1 Timothy 3:15. Within this arch at the top are branches of flowering dogwoods, symbolic of rebirth. The larger arch, framing the inner arch, contains a mandala, embedded with a red and rose templar cross and a golden crown encased in purple, signifying Christ’s eternal kingdom as in Revelation 11:15 – *‘The world has now become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and he will reign forever and ever’*. Throughout the window, we see laurel leaves and flowers, symbolizing the triumph and victory of Christ’s resurrection.

Ezekiel 34 is prophetically significant to the story depicted in that the prophet speaks of God’s message of being the ‘Good Shepherd’ Himself to His flock, who has been wronged by the Shepherds of Israel: *“Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds, the leaders of Israel. Give them this message from the Sovereign Lord: What sorrow awaits you shepherds who feed yourselves instead of your flocks.... You have not taken care of the weak. You have not tended the sick or bound up the injured. You have not gone looking for those who have wandered away and are lost. Instead, you have ruled them with harshness and cruelty.... You abandoned my flock and left them to be attacked by every wild animal and though you were my shepherds, you did not search for my sheep when they were lost. You took care of yourselves and left the sheep to starve. For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will search and find my sheep. I will be like a shepherd looking for his scattered flock. I will find my sheep and rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on that dark and cloudy day. I will bring them back home to their own land of Israel from among the peoples and nations. I will feed them on the mountains of Israel and by the rivers and in all the places where people live. Yes, I will give them good pastureland on the high hills of Israel. There they will lie down in pleasant places and feed in the lush pastures of the hills. I myself will tend my sheep and give them a place to lie down in peace, says the Sovereign Lord. I will search for my lost ones who strayed away, and I will bring them safely home again. I will bandage the injured and strengthen the weak. But I will destroy those who are fat and powerful. I will feed them, yes—feed them justice!”*

Jesus' teaching of the Good Shepherd recorded in John 10 is directed to the Pharisees, following the events of John 9, where Jesus heals the man who was born blind on the Sabbath. The story is a reflection of what Ezekiel speaks of in his prophecy of Jesus as the Good Shepherd and the examples of the ill-intentioned and selfish hearts of the Shepherds of Israel. Note that the prophecy of Ezekiel should have been well known by the religious leaders, but Jesus' teaching of the Good Shepherd fell on deaf ears and blind eyes.

Jesus and His disciples approach a blind man from birth. His disciples ask which parent had sin since he was born blind. Jesus tells them neither – *'this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him'*. Jesus spits on the ground, makes some mud and places it on the blind man's eyes. He tells the man to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. He does as Jesus commands and gains his sight. The man's neighbors debate if this is the man that was blind. They ask him how his eyes were opened and he tells them.

The Pharisees investigate the healing and asks the man and he tells them his story. Some Pharisees claim that Jesus was not of God since he healed on the Sabbath. Others disagree saying no sinner could do such things. They ask the man again in disbelief. They then ask his parents but his parents were afraid of the Pharisees, knowing that they would be put out of the synagogue. They tell them to ask their son - he was of age. The Pharisees ask the healed man yet again and he asks them do they want to become Jesus' disciples. They then hurl insults accusing him of being a disciple of Jesus and not of Moses as they were. "We don't even know where he comes from." The healed man states that that was remarkable yet Jesus was able to open his eyes, and then reiterates that if Jesus was not of God, he could do nothing. The Pharisees infuriated then throws the healed man out, telling him that he was steeped in sin at birth and should not be lecturing them.

Jesus hears this so he approached the healed man and asks if he believed in the Son of Man. He asks Jesus who the Son of Man is and Jesus tells him that it is He, upon which the healed man states that he believes and then worships Jesus. *Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?" Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.*

The religious leaders had shown themselves to be so unhelpful and cruel to the man, his parents, and the common people in general that Jesus felt it necessary to talk about the contrast between His heart and work as a leader to God's people and the heart and work of many of the religious leaders of His day. Jesus speaks of the true, legitimate shepherd, who enters in the way that is proper and prepared. He who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way is a thief and a robber. The religious leaders gained their place among God's people – the sheep spoken of here – through personal and political connections, through formal education, through ambition, manipulation, and corruption. Jesus speaks of the doorkeeper (the Holy Spirit) who opens the door for the shepherd with the sheep knowing the voice of the shepherd and follow Him. They would not follow a voice they did not know but yet the Pharisees still did not understand.

In towns of that time, sheep from many flocks were kept for the night in a common sheepfold, overseen by one doorkeeper who regulated which shepherds brought and took which sheep. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out: The shepherd calls the sheep by name, showing that the shepherd has a personal connection with the sheep.

Jesus, the true shepherd, protects and promotes life; the false shepherds take away life. Then Jesus said to them again, “Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly.”

Here Jesus used another picture from sheep farming in His time. Out in the pasturelands for sheep, pens were made with only one entrance. The door for those sheep pens was the shepherd himself. He laid his body across the entrance, to keep the sheep in and to keep out the wolves. The shepherd was in fact the door, protecting from the cunning and stealth of the thief and the violence of the robber.

In John 10:11-15, Jesus speaks, *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.”*

In John 10:16, Jesus says, “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.” These other sheep are the Gentiles who believe and follow Jesus.

In John 10:17-18, Jesus gives claim of His power over life and death. “Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.” Yet there remained some who heard what Jesus proclaimed but still did not believe.

We give praise and thanks for the Lord Jesus is indeed our shepherd in whom we have no want, as He leads us to green pastures beside still waters, restoring our souls, pouring out His goodness and mercy all the days of our life, while we await His dwelling presence and glory forever.

A song to reflect and pray on:

[\(120\) Fernando Ortega: The Good Shepherd - YouTube](#)

Looking ahead – Sunday April 16

Vestibule Window I – The House of the Lord (Psalm 42:4)