

Rev. Dr. Yugo Suzuki's sermon

3/7/10 **"Jesus Is the Good Shepherd" John 10: 11-15**

Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd." What does Jesus the good shepherd do for his sheep? His words are clear. "I lay down my life for the sheep."

By risking his own life, the shepherd protects the sheep from the wolf.

What does the wolf mean here? It symbolizes every kind of domination, oppression, and injustice that deny the sacred worth of human beings. So the phrase "the Good Shepherd" had connotations that were socially subversive.

Jesus the Good Shepherd was subversive, because he left no doubt in the people's minds that the Roman government was the wolf.

The greatest colonial power in the world was devouring and scattering the Jewish people.

Jesus the Good Shepherd was subversive in another sense, too. Jesus contrasted himself with the hired hands that ran away from the wolf, leaving the sheep completely at its mercy.

Again, there was no mistaking that the hired hands were Herod the Great, the puppet of Caesar, and the religious leaders in Jerusalem who were compromising their faith to keep peace with Rome.

In short, Jesus the Good Shepherd stood up to the oppressors and their hired hands for the sake of the poor and the oppressed.

"I lay down my life for the sheep. I know my sheep, and my sheep know me."

Here the verb "know" has deep meaning in the Bible. When a person says to another, "I know you," that person is saying, "We are bound together by the bond of love".

That is why in the Bible the word "know" is used to express the unbreakable ties between God and human beings, wife and husband, parents and children, and friend and friend.

When Jesus said, "I know my sheep, and my sheep know me," he meant that each individual is God's most precious creation, therefore, irreplaceable and infinitely worthy. This affirmation is the foundation of our hope and courage.

No power in this world can give us such hope and such courage.

"I am the good shepherd." Jesus is speaking these words to us today.

Jesus' words become even more convincing when we identify who the wolf is for us. It may be worshiping money. It may be self-centeredness that makes us indifferent to the plight of neighbors. It may be ethnocentrism that lifts up a specific ethnic group as superior to others. It may be secularism that denies anything that transcends reason and logic.

Christian faith affirms that divine love revealed in Jesus Christ alone can protect us from the wolf that kills our body and spirit. Only Jesus who died for us can give us the courage to withstand the power of modern day wolves.

This morning we are celebrating Holy Communion. The persons who are kneeling beside you are bound to you tightly by Jesus' love.

This morning Christians are worshiping in various churches in New York City. You and they are all bound together by Jesus' love.

Christians throughout the world are bound to each other by the love of Christ, the friend of the sheep, the Good Shepherd, indeed.

What wondrous love! What amazing grace!

Thanks be to God.