

**These Windows Can Speak**  
**Part 4: Guidance and Got-ness**  
**Jesus the Good Shepherd**  
**In Honour of Dewitt and Mildred Davis**  
**Text: Luke 12:16-21**  
**Preached by Bruce D. Ervin**  
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I was sitting in the Atlanta airport one day. I'd just finished hiking a piece of the Appalachian Trail and after a week in the wilderness I was being re-introduced to the problematic wonders of western civilization. So I'm sitting in the airport and this rather comely young woman walks by, and on her t-shirt it says, "Got Jesus?"

If I'd had a chance to speak with her I would've said, "No." Now don't get me wrong; it's not like I'd somehow lost my faith while walking in the woods. In fact, the whole experience of hiking the trail known as the AT *deepened* my faith *profoundly*. I believed then and I believe now that Jesus is the closest thing that we have to a picture of God. In other words, what I believe about God flows from the love and compassion and justice that I see in Jesus. But have I "got Jesus?" No, because Jesus is not something that I can possess. I can't own or grasp or control him anymore than I can own or grasp or control a star, or the sky, or another person.

I may not be able to have a hold on Jesus. But I trust that he has a hold on me. Like a shepherd has a hold of a young lamb, bearing the vulnerable creature through a dangerous valley, so I trust that Jesus has a hold on me. God says through the prophet, "You are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you... [For] you are precious in my eyes...and I love you" (Isaiah 43:1-2, 4).

This all came back to me several weeks ago as I began to reflect on the three windows at the back of the Sanctuary. It was particularly the middle window, of course, which got me to thinking about walking through deep rivers and dark valleys and being safe in the arms of Jesus. The middle window, "Jesus the Good Shepherd," a gift to this congregation from the late Dewitt and Mildred Davis. Mr. Davis was a school teacher and a principal. As such he shepherded children and teachers and other school staff through his many decades of serving as an educator and administrator. Mrs. Davis was, among many other things, a wife and mother. And that vocation entails considerable shepherding as well. Overseeing the care of an entire household – children and husband alike – you pretty much have to be an educator and administrator in your own right.

So the Davises knew something about shepherding. They knew something about offering care and guidance, compassion and tough love. It's not surprising, then, that when they decided to give a stained glass window to the church, they chose the theme of Jesus the Good Shepherd. If children look to their teacher for guidance, if teachers look to their principal for guidance, how

much more must we all look to Jesus for guidance? “The *Lord* is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, he leadeth me beside the still waters, he restoreth my soul...Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me” (Psalm 23:1-4).

These words from the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm are clear: If the *Lord* is my shepherd, I shall not want. I shall not want for a sense of peace and security, because I trust him. But also, I shall not want for the latest electronic gadget, or a fancy car, or a bigger home because these things have lost their value when compared with the *incredible* joy of knowing that my Redeemer liveth (Job 19:25), of sensing that he is with me always (Mathew 28:20), of trusting that nothing, not even death, can separate us (Romans 8:38-39). I shall not want for things that are perishable because I have experienced the imperishable reality of God, revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord.

The *Lord* is my shepherd, I shall not want. It is *he* who will carry me through the dark valleys and the deep waters of life. This is a lesson that what passes for civilization needs to learn and needs to learn *fast*. I am appalled when I’m driving down the highway, and I pass these huge luxury motor homes; especially the ones that are pulling an SUV behind them! How much gas are they consuming? How much carbon are they throwing into the air? And if their comfort is found in such motorized manors, what are they going to do when the oil runs out and the planet has been warmed to the point where our lives will be radically changed forever? I mean, it’s bad enough that I’m spewing carbon into God’s Creation with my little Toyota. Where’s the high speed rail link down to Windsor, and the swift connection at Detroit that will whisk me nearly pollution free to Chicago? A civilization that took seriously the words of Jesus would say, “I can do without the inordinate luxury of a massive motor home and a humongous house. Better for the money that I waste on such luxuries to be allocated through a progressive tax system to fund a state of the art rail system in central Canada and a dependable public transit system in Toronto. If the Lord is my shepherd I shall not want for perishable luxuries, but if we keep destroying God’s Creation I *shall* want for fresh air and clean water and a temperate climate.

The *Lord* is my shepherd. Jesus guides us away from earthly treasures which may vanish overnight to a Reality of true and lasting wealth (see Matthew 6:19-21). You know that rich man whom Jesus talked about? The one who had such an abundant harvest and he figured that he had it made for the rest of his life (see Luke 12:16-21)? When God said to him, “This very night your life is being demanded of you,” we assume that he died that night, leaving all of his wealth behind. But maybe God was demanding his life in another way. Maybe God came to him in a dream and demanded that he devote his life not to amassing more and more wealth for himself but to committing his life *and* his wealth to building affordable housing, or adequately funding health care, or developing alternative sources of energy. To whom will his wealth go if civilization falls apart for lack of these things? The answer is that it will go to no one because it will vanish in the social and political and economic crash that will

surely come if we don't stop amassing goods for ourselves and failing to plan long-term and attend to the *common* good.

In the final analysis, it is God alone who satisfies the thirsty; God alone who fills the hungry with good things (see Psalm 107:9). Because when we humans are in touch with our truest selves, we hunger and thirst for *righteousness* (Matthew 5:6); not for *perishable* wealth but for *righteousness*. "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God," Jesus said, "and *all* these things will be given to you" (Matthew 6:33).

This message has been driven home to me while going through the boxes of possessions and piles of clutter at my house. Boxes that haven't been opened in *years*. Who needs it? Have you noticed the number of storage facilities in Scarborough? People make big bucks off of those of us who have not only far more than we need but also far more than we know what to do with! Just as Jesus warned us, we are rich in things and poor toward God (see Luke 12:21).

But if the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. It is he who prepares a table of abundance before me; even in the presence of my enemies, so that I can share with them. My cup overflows not with the latest gadgets from Apple or Blackberry; no, it overflows with love and justice and compassion, with respect and care for Creation. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever (Ps 23:5-6).

These are the fruits of following Jesus. These are the goods which we get when we are guided by Jesus. It's not about what we possess; it's about who possesses us. Nothing in all Creation can separate us from the God who has been revealed to us in Christ Jesus our Lord. *Nothing*. St. Augustine said that God is nearer to us than we are to ourselves. That's how much God loves us; *all* of us. We are always held in the embrace of the One whom we know through Jesus the Christ.

So, got Jesus? No, but I trust the he's got me. Amen.