I like the way Jesus is always pragmatic in his teaching and preaching, using imageries that his audience can readily identify with and relate to in their daily lives. And, you know what the fascinating thing about Jesus’ teaching and preaching is? They all possess certain spiritual distinctiveness and profound truth.

In John 10, we are presented with the account of Jesus’ teaching about the shepherd and his flock. Jesus once again draws on an imagery that was intricately woven into the daily life of the people while depicting a profound truth. Here, Jesus paints a scenario to illustrate the unique relationship between a shepherd and his flock. This relationship between shepherd and flock ran deep. In ancient Palestine, shepherds had a real relationship with their sheep and it was so personal that the shepherd named his sheep and knew each sheep, and the sheep knew their shepherd’s voice.

To illustrate this point, Sarah Henrich gave an account of a preacher who talked of his life in Africa, and he told the amazing story of how the people of a village knew each other’s sheep in a manner of how neighbours know each other’s children. The preacher was so amazed that villagers would from time to time ask other villagers if they had seen their sheep.

It was no different in ancient Palestine. “More than one flock may be kept in the same fold. Often flocks are even mixed while being watered at the well. No attempt is made to separate them. When it is time to separate the sheep, one shepherd after another will stand up and call out: "Tahhoo! Tahhoo!" or a similar call of his own choice. The sheep will lift their heads, and after a scramble each one will begin following his master” [Michael Chen].

It was important that the relationship between shepherd and sheep was of this nature because the people largely depended on sheep for their living. Also, the sheep that was prone to wander and go astray, without a shepherd, was extremely vulnerable to harm by predators such as lions and wolves, among other dangers that come with wandering without a guide.

Having therefore offered a profoundly true illustration of the relationship between the shepherd and the sheep, that John says Jesus’ hearers “did not understand”, Jesus goes on to make the distinctive spiritual connection between the earthly relationship between shepherd and sheep by way of explaining that not only is he the “good shepherd” that tends the sheep but he is also “the gate” through which the sheep goes out to find pasture and goes into the fold to find rest and shelter. In other words, Jesus is proffering to his hearers that he is the only way to life and rest for anyone who seeks such and would follow him.

From time to time, we are challenged with thoughts and questions as to whether Jesus cares for us as Christians, or even the world at large. We struggle with our faith when we are personally faced with life’s adversities and setbacks, even as we grope as though in the darkness to find meaning to our unfortunate experiences and our general existence. Here we are tempted and we may even ask or ponder the question: ‘does Jesus care?’ We struggle with our faith when we witness adversities or harrowing
circumstances befalling those we know or strangers even, in our neighbourhood, our community, or our city. Here again, we are tempted and we may even ask or ponder the question: ‘does Jesus care?’ And finally, we struggle with our faith when we watch on the TV, see or read on the Internet, hear over the soundwaves, or read in the newspaper of the different atrocities that have befallen people of all walks of life, often perpetuated by fellow humans and sometimes an act of nature. Yet again, we are tempted and we may even ask or ponder the question: ‘does Jesus care?’ My answer to the question is, ‘yes, Jesus cares!’

No one knew better than David that the One who is the Good Shepherd of humanity, cares for us more than we can even begin to imagine. David, who it is said is author of Psalm 23 was a shepherd himself. He knew and understood what it means to be shepherd, and when he considered his own life and faith, he concluded that the Lord is his shepherd.

There are therefore some things I wish to point out about Jesus, the Good Shepherd:

1. The Good Shepherd HAS THE WELL-BEING of the sheep at heart
   If we ever wondered if Jesus cares, we are best reminded that even while on cross he did not consider his own suffering but prayed to the Father for the forgiveness of the world. Like a shepherd knows the danger of caring for the sheep in the wild, Jesus knew that the world that he came to save from sin would persecute him, ridicule him, chastise him and put him to death. Yet, he did not consider his own comfort before our needs but gave himself up even to die for those who would kill him. The Good Shepherd sacrifices for the sheep, even if it means facing the darkness of his night alone. Jesus thinks about us and cares deeply for us even when we take no thought of our own well-being, and this is evident in his teaching where he does not draw attention to himself but encourages us to care and look out for each other and live good with one another.

2. The Good Shepherd PROVIDES for the sheep’s needs
   It is the responsibility of the shepherd to provide for the needs of the sheep. The Good Shepherd provides pasture for the sheep. For the sheep, pasture is where life happens. It is where the sheep finds sustenance and experiences the attentive care of the shepherd. Do we not have food to eat, clothes to wear, somewhere to live, and families and friends for company? All these give us a sense of comfort and security. The provision of the Good Shepherd is nowhere better depicted than in Psalm 23. Here, David exclaims, “The Lord is my shepherd he shall not be in want…. Is it not amazing to think of how the Lord takes care of us daily, giving us exactly what we need, and then some? That even when we are faithless, the Lord remains faithful to his promise to supply all our needs from his riches (2 Tim. 2:13; Php. 4:19). The Good Shepherd cause the sheep to lack no good thing. That is why David again exclaims in Psalm 34:10 that “… those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.”

3. The Good Shepherd PROTECTS the sheep
   Shepherding is a dangerous task because the sheep is easy prey for wild predators and thieves. Being a shepherd himself, again, no one would know that better than David. When young David stepped forward to face Goliath, he had to provide his credentials as protector of the sheep against predators such as lions and bears. For this reason, David exclaimed in Psalm 23, “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 staff they comfort me.” As the Good Shepherd, Jesus protects us, especially from the evil of Satan. Like the shepherd the keeps watch over the sheep at nights, while we are asleep, the angels of the Lord watches over us. I have had many near misses in life and I put it to you that when I think about those near misses I shudder and cringe. And I conclude with certainty that it is the hand of the Lord on me, protecting me. We are protected by the Lord daily.

The story in the Book of Acts demonstrates that Jesus the Good Shepherd, continues to care for us. In this story, we see that in the Church, everyone had well-being of the other at heart. Because of this, they provided for each other’s needs, thus, seeing to the protection of the vulnerable among them.

Jesus the Good Shepherd cares for all of us.

- He has our well-being at heart
- He provides for our needs
- He protects us daily