

Sermon followed by Service - April 26, 26 - Good Shepherd Sunday - Jn 10:1-10

Good Shepherd Sunday is one of my favorite Sundays of the year. But Good Shepherd Sunday doesn't feel all good, does it? To appreciate the good of Good Shepherd Sunday I need to come to grips with being a sheep. Not like those sheep in our window, but like the sheep we saw on vacation - dirty, ugly, running scared and ornery, needing to be fenced in, or else. To truly appreciate the good of Good Shepherd Sunday, I need to come to grips with the Truth that it's better to be a helpless sheep than bullish like a bull or snarling and biting like a wolf; better to be a needy sheep than independent like a cat; better to be a submissive sheep than stubborn like a donkey. That's hard, isn't it? We live in a world where we're taught you have to be bullish to get ahead; you have to growl and bite to protect yourself; it's better to be free and do your own thing than to listen and follow. But when we're willing to be sheep, we're ready to appreciate the Good News of Good Shepherd Sunday.

And the good news is - with Jesus we have the shepherd we need, a shepherd so committed to us that he took our place as wandering sheep - not to give us company, but to be punished in our place. As Isaiah said: **"We all like sheep have gone astray, but the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."** That's not fair, is it?! But Jesus didn't argue and fight. Instead, Jesus took our sin to the cross, and there he paid. He paid for the way we turn away from God like wandering sheep. He paid for the way we bite and growl and snarl at each other like wolves. He paid for the way we bully like bulls, or push back stubborn like donkeys and mules. No matter what kind of animal we might act like, Jesus took our place and paid the price for the way we've acted like animals instead of like children of God. So now what? Instead of seeing us as stupid sheep always going the wrong way, with Jesus God sees you as forgiven and faithful, following your Good Shepherd. Instead of having to fend for ourselves, you have a Good Shepherd who loves you so much, who watches over you so closely, he knows you and calls you by name. With Jesus, we have the shepherd we need to take care of us and keep us safe, to lead us through the gate to life where goodness and mercy will follow us and we will dwell in the house of the LORD forever! That's the good news we have with Jesus as our Good Shepherd.

But there is bad news. There are people out to take you away from your shepherd. So how do we stay safe - not safe hunkered down in a hole, but safe and living life to the full? Jesus has the answer. He tells us something of a mini-parable. We have three main characters - the flock of sheep, the shepherd, and the

thieves and robbers. Both the robbers and the shepherd come for the sheep. So how do the sheep know whom to trust?

Sheep learn the voice of the shepherd who leads them and feeds them. Sheep learn the voice of the shepherd who protects them and rescues them. Sheep learn the voice of their shepherd and they listen for his voice. They listen to what he says and how he says it. And when they hear the voice and the call of their shepherd, they trust that voice and they follow.

But what about when the thief calls? Jesus tells us: **“They will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.”** Even if the stranger imitates the true shepherd, the sheep will run. Even if the stranger dresses up in the shepherd’s clothes, the sheep will run. Back in Colorado, a family told me how one day the sheep got out of their pen, so the rancher and his visiting relatives - the cousins and in-laws - went out to round up the strays. Whenever the rancher or his wife would call, the sheep would come in; but whenever the relatives would call, it didn’t matter that they were using the same words, even calling the sheep by name, the sheep would run. Sheep know the voice of their shepherd.

So how do we know whom to follow? How do we know if a pastor or teacher is a true shepherd leading us with Jesus, or away from Jesus? How about that website or TV preacher who sounds so good? Or that church that sounds so full of life? How do we know if the voice we hear in our head is the voice of Jesus or not? How do we know? If someone you love and respect at church says: “things need to change; we need to get rid of those old-fashioned church-laws” ... or someone else you love and respect says: “we need get back to the old way of doing things, because that’s God’s way” ... how do you know whom to follow? When your financial advisor or a friend says: “It’s your life, if you don’t take care of yourself, no one else will; it’s your life, live it your way” ... how do you know whom to follow?

Know the voice of your shepherd. Know the words of your shepherd. His voice, his words lead to life. If the people trying to lead you, if their words and voice don’t fit with Jesus, following them will lead to death. That’s why we read our Bibles; that’s why we have Bible Class - so we can know the voice of our Shepherd. Then, just as a sheep knows its shepherd by his voice, you can test the people who are trying to lead you by testing their words. Test what they say with what Jesus says. If their words don’t fit with Jesus, following them can only lead you away from Jesus. That’s why, as sheep who know our Shepherd’s voice, when we hear a strange voice, when we hear a voice that doesn’t match with Jesus: **“we**

run away” As sheep of our Good Shepherd, we don’t follow someone who’s leading us away from our Shepherd. But if their words do match the Good Shepherd’s words, as sheep we do what sheep do - we listen and we follow our Shepherd.

And what does our Good Shepherd have for us? When we follow our Good Shepherd, what can we look forward to? Jesus says: **“I have come that they - my sheep - you - might have life, and have it to the full.”** So what is “life to the full”?

Well, when does your life seem empty? When you feel alone, when your heart feels empty, when nothing seems to go right for you Think of what your Good Shepherd has for you. **“The Lord is my Shepherd, I will not be in want.”** With Jesus, his love makes sure we’re taken care of; his love makes life right for us. “Life to the full” is a life with God’s love, a life full of God’s blessing.

On vacation, I got to eat shrimp and crab and oysters just steps from the beach, but after a few days of the “good life,” my heart and mind kept thinking of something more than just a full belly and a happy head. And my feet kept telling me I’m not long for this world. That can sure lead to an empty feeling - watching, feeling our bodies fall apart. But what does Jesus have for us? With our Shepherd, we have a better life coming - **“we will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”** We get to live with God in heaven! We get to look forward to life the way it’s supposed to be - our bodies and souls filled with life and love, peace and happiness.

But we don’t have to wait for heaven to live life to the full. Life to the full starts here in this world. So when does your life seem empty? How about when life doesn’t seem to have a purpose? When life doesn’t seem to have a purpose, it doesn’t matter how much food or fun we might have; when life doesn’t seem to have a purpose, sooner or later life will feel empty. But Jesus has a life of purpose for us. With Jesus, you aren’t just sheep - helpless and hopeless. With Jesus, you have what it takes to help people through the valley of the shadow of death. With Jesus, you aren’t just sheep - carried along and consuming; with Jesus you get to be sheep and shepherds leading people to life. With Jesus, you aren’t just sheep needing care, but your Good Shepherd has entrusted his flock, his church, to your care. You get to be your Good Shepherd’s voice - calling people to life; you get to be your Good shepherd’s arms, picking up and carrying the weak and hurting. You get to carry your Good Shepherd’s staff and club to put the devil in his place. You get to smile your Good Shepherd’s smile, sharing his love.

Put all that together - a life with purpose, a life of blessing, the life of heaven
- that's life to the full - that's the life he has for you! So, as sheep, what do we do?
We listen and we live! Amen.

DIVINE SERVICE II

IN OUR WORLD TODAY ... we are constantly being called, texted, emailed by people who are out to lie to us, scam us, and take what we have and who we are. We also live in a world where tempters and philosophers of the world and false teachers in the church are out to lie to us, scam us spiritually, and take what we have and who we are (our Identity with Jesus).

IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ... as we celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday, Jesus shows himself to be the true and right way to life the way it is supposed to be - with God.

OPENING HYMN

“Blessed Jesus, at Your Word”
Hymn 919

Blessèd Jesus, at your Word
we are gathered all to hear you.
Let our hearts and souls be stirred
now to seek and love and fear you,
by your teachings, sweet and holy,
drawn from earth to love you solely.

All our knowledge, sense, and sight
lie in deepest darkness shrouded
till your Spirit breaks our night
with the beams of truth unclouded.
You alone to God can win us;
you must work all good within us.

Gracious Savior, good and kind,
Light from Light, from God proceeding,
open now our heart and mind;
help us by your Spirit's pleading.
Hear the cry your Church now raises;
hear and bless our prayers and praises.

Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
praise to you and adoration!
Grant that we your Word may trust,
confident of our salvation,
while we here below must wander,
till we sing your praises yonder.

INVOCATION

M: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: **Amen.**

CONFESSION

M: Dear friends, let us approach God with a true heart and confess our sins,
asking him in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to forgive us.

C: **Lord of life, I confess that I am by nature dead in sin.
For faithless worrying and selfish pride,
For sins of habit and sins of choice,
For the evil I have done and the good I have failed to do,
I deserve to be cast away from your presence forever.
O Lord, I am sorry for my sins. Forgive me, for Jesus' sake.**

ABSOLUTION

M: Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. In his great mercy,
God made us alive in Christ even when we were dead in our sins. Hear the word
of Christ through his called servant: I forgive you all your sins in the name of the
Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: **Amen.**

LORD, HAVE MERCY (*Kyrie*)

M: In peace, let us pray to the Lord.

For the well-being of all people everywhere, that they may receive from
you all they need to sustain body and life, hear our prayer, O Lord.

C: **Lord, have mercy.**

M: For the spread of your life-giving gospel throughout the world, that all who are lost in sin may be brought to faith in you, hear our prayer, O Christ.

C: **Christ, have mercy.**

M: For patience and perseverance in this life, that we may not lose the hope of heaven as we await your return, hear our prayer, O Lord.

C: **Lord, have mercy.**

M: Lord of life, live in us that we may live for you.

C: **Amen.**

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O Lord Jesus Christ, you are the Good Shepherd who laid down your life for the sheep. Lead us now to the still waters of your life-giving Word that we may abide in your Father's house forevermore; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

FIRST READING

Acts 2:42–47

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

PSALM OF THE DAY

Psalm 23F

My shepherd will supply my need,
Jehovah is his name;
in pastures fresh he makes me feed
beside the living stream.
He brings my wand'ring spirit back
when I forsake his ways

and leads me, for his mercy's sake,
in paths of truth and grace.

When I walk through the shades of death,
his presence is my stay;
one word of his supporting breath
drives all my fears away.
His hand, in sight of all my foes,
will still my table spread;
my cup with blessings overflows;
his oil anoints my head.

The sure provisions of my God
attend me all my days;
oh, may his house be my abode
and all my work be praise.
There would I find a settled rest
while others go and come,
no more a stranger or a guest
but like a child at home.

Second Reading

1 Peter 2:19–25

For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

“He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.”

When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. “He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.” For “you were like sheep going astray,” but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

This is the feast of victory for our God.

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

Blessing, honor, glory, and might

be to God and the Lamb forever. Amen. (Refrain)

This is the feast of victory for our God.

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

GOSPEL

John 10:1–10

“Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise be to you, O Christ!

THE SECOND ARTICLE (REDEMPTION)

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand

of God the Father Almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

What does this mean?

I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord. He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death. All this he did that I should be his own, and live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he has risen from death and lives and rules eternally.

This is most certainly true.

HYMN OF THE DAY

“The King of Love My Shepherd Is”

Hymn 552

The King of love my shepherd is,
whose goodness fails me never;
I nothing lack if I am his,
and he is mine forever.

Where streams of living water flow,
my Savior gently leads me,
and where the verdant pastures grow,
with food celestial feeds me.

Perverse and foolish oft I strayed,
but yet in love he sought me
and on his shoulder gently laid
and home, rejoicing, brought me.

In death's dark vale I fear no ill
with you, dear Lord, beside me,
your rod and staff my comfort still,
your cross before to guide me.

You spread a table in my sight,
a banquet here bestowing;
your oil of welcome, my delight;
my cup is overflowing!

And so through all the length of days
your goodness fails me never;
Good Shepherd, may I sing your praise
within your house forever!

SERMON

John 10:1–10

HYMN

“Jesus, Shepherd of the Sheep”
Hymn 551

Jesus, shepherd of the sheep,
who your Father’s flock does keep,
safe we wake and safe we sleep,
guarded still by you.

In your promise firm we stand,
none can take us from your hand;
speak — we hear — at your command,
we will follow you.

By your blood our souls were bought,
by your life salvation wrought;
by your light our feet are taught,
Lord, to follow you.

Father, draw us to your Son;
we with joy will follow on
till the work of grace is done,
there to live with you.

We, in robes of glory dressed,
join th’ assembly of the blest,

gathered to eternal rest
in the fold with you.

OFFERING PRAYER

O Lord, as our Good Shepherd, you wondrously, generously, graciously provide us with all that we need. Help us to live and to give without fear or worry, stinginess or selfishness, but with contentment, thanksgiving, and a heart eager to reflect your goodness – for your glory and the good of your flock. Amen.

OFFERING

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PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Loving Shepherd of the sheep, fill us with contentment and confidence during this season as we celebrate your Easter victory. You laid down your life for the sheep and then rose again to assure us that you give us eternal life.

Good Shepherd, save us.

Strengthen our faith to follow where you lead, to the green pastures of your Word, the quiet waters of our baptism, and the gracious table of your body and blood where our cup overflows with your forgiving love. Guide us to find in you the gate that leads to safety and good pastures.

Good Shepherd, lead us.

Guard and protect us from those who want to lead us astray and snatch us out of your hand. Give us courage to fight against the devil and wisdom to recognize false teachers. Lead us to honor and follow those you have called to shepherd your flock, the Church.

Good Shepherd, guide us.

Let your rod and your staff comfort us and all your sheep in times of sickness and sadness and especially when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. [We include in our prayers today... *here name the person and the cause of the petition.*] May we find in your redemption and your Father's resolve the unbreakable promise that we will dwell in your house forever.

Good Shepherd, console us.

Move us to reach out to sheep who are not yet a part of our sheep pen but whom you have claimed as your own. Give us your passion to search for the sheep who are lost and lead us to rejoice when they have been found.

Good Shepherd, inspire us.

Hear us, Lord, as we pray in silence. *Silent prayer*

We thank you for all the blessings we have gained from your goodness: family and friends, wealth and health, work and leisure. Give us wisdom to long for and cherish your more precious gifts, your Word and sacraments, so that your goodness and love may follow us all the days of our life.

Good Shepherd, hear us. Amen.

PRAYER AND LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

BLESSING

M: The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace. **Amen.**

CLOSING HYMN

"I am Jesus' Little Lamb"

Hymn 804

I am Jesus' little lamb;
ever glad at heart I am,
for my Shepherd gently guides me,
knows my need and well provides me,
loves me ev'ry day the same,
even calls me by my name.

Day by day, at home, away,
Jesus is my staff and stay.

When I hunger, Jesus feeds me,

into pleasant pastures leads me;
when I thirst, he bids me go
where the quiet waters flow.

Who so happy as I am,
even now the Shepherd's lamb?
And when my short life is ended,
by his angel host attended,
he shall fold me to his breast,
there within his arms to rest.

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