

# "What It Means to Have a Good Shepherd"

Text: John 10:11-18

May the undeserved love of God be multiplied to you, and may you know and enjoy the peace which comes only to those who trust Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

Sheep are stupid. People are sheep. Get the point? Get the connection?

Christians gladly adopt terms like "I am Jesus little lamb" and "sheep of the Good Shepherd." When we do, I'm afraid we are almost exclusively focusing on the cute and sweet aspects of lambs and what we envision to be the loveable characteristics of sheep. Since most of us don't really have the faintest idea just how stupid sheep can be, we tend to accept the label as both a term of endearment from our God and as a compliment. While it certainly does convey God's love, it is anything but complimentary.

Does this offend us – like the old joke about what the Lone Ranger did to Tonto when he finally found out what "Kemosabe" meant? Of course not; it teaches us. It enlightens and instructs us. In the best possible sense it puts us in our place. It reminds, for example, us that we are sheep, and therefore in desperate need of a shepherd. In God's eyes we are not the ones who provide and protect; we are the ones who are constantly in need of both.

On this Good Shepherd Sunday we are reminded of *what it means to have a Good Shepherd*. The text that will guide and instruct us is found in John's Gospel, the Tenth Chapter:

<sup>ESV</sup> **John 10:11-18** *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. <sup>13</sup> He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. <sup>14</sup> I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, <sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. <sup>17</sup> For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. <sup>18</sup> No*

*one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."*

These are the very words of God, given to mankind in general, and this morning to you and me in particular. We trust God's promise that those who hear – really *hear* - his words and treasure them will receive his blessing. Asking him to bless us through our study this morning we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

It is almost universally true that those who do their jobs the best tend to be taken for granted the most. The reason is clear enough. When a worker does a job consistently well, we all tend to assume that he or she will continue to do that job well. While not necessarily good, it does make sense. We have enough to worry about in life without bothering ourselves with those rare "sure things." So we take certain others for granted. We do this with man, we do this with God. We do this *especially* with God. Why? When is the last time God has let you down, or failed to keep one of his promises? Never, of course. Not once. Which is why it is so easy to fall into the pattern of taking God for granted. We have a God who **"sends rain on the just and on the unjust."** That means that our thanks and our prayers will not earn us those gifts since he gives them freely to all. Yet our God both expects and deserves thanksgiving. He is pleased with a grateful people, with thankful children.

There are certain customs and patterns that our God built into the life of the Christian to remind us not to take our God and his goodness for granted. In the Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer we are taught to pray: **"Give us this day our daily bread."** Why did Jesus say, **"Give us this day our daily bread"**? Why not "...this week" or "...this year"? Why, too, do Christians routinely pray before each meal? Because God wants and deserves ongoing thanks and praise. Why is that so important? Mostly because God says so, but also because taking anything for granted leads inevitably to a sense of entitlement; and entitlement eventually leads to the notion that we *deserve* every good thing that our God gives us. Then whenever God, for our spiritual welfare, sees fit to give us less, we feel cheated by God. We act as if God has let us down, as though he has somehow fallen down on the job.

Our text for this morning tells us that just the opposite is always true. Our Savior God never fails us. He is, on the contrary, our *Good Shepherd* – in every possible way.

It's no wonder Jesus referred to us so often as sheep. Sheep are dirty and smelly, but our Good Shepherd says, *"I love the sheep."* Sheep are also amazingly stupid creatures. A sheep, so we are told, will wander off the edge of a cliff simply because the sheep ahead of him did it. A fellow pastor recently shared his experience with sheep. Coming around the corner of an out-building, he startled a sheep standing in its pen. Without breaking eye-contact the sheep took off running – headfirst and full speed into the side of the barn. We're also told that sheep will run from a wolf, but will stop and watch when he catches and kills another member of the flock, allowing the wolf to slaughter the entire flock, one by one.

That's us. We are indeed sheep. We run headfirst into danger and forget to flee when danger threatens. We don't stop to consider the possible consequences of our actions. We don't tend to consider the needs of others or how our actions will negatively affect them. We pretty much just go where we want to go, and then seem surprised when we find ourselves in the jaws of trouble.

If there is one thing that is universally true about sheep, it is that they desperately need a shepherd. Always. Without a shepherd they (we) are easy pickings for predators and they (we) will universally fall victim to their own foolishness. Again, that's us. More specifically, that's *me*.

This is part of what Jesus was telling us in the words of our text for this morning. We too desperately need not only *the* Good Shepherd but we also need an under-shepherd and a flock. How are we supposed to choose our under-shepherd and flock (our pastor and church home)? With the wolf in mind. The wolf is Satan (or, for that matter, anyone who works for Satan) and come they will. The "Good Shepherd" is, of course, Jesus. The Good Shepherd has under-shepherds (pastors) and the tricky part is that they also are themselves sheep. These are *not* supposed to be those described in our text as "the hired hand." The under-shepherds are supposed to be those described in Acts 20:28, ***"Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood."***

The hired hand is different. He works for the Wolf. Oh he doesn't always *think* he does – just as Peter didn't think he was working for the Wolf when he tried to talk the Good Shepherd out of laying down his life for the sheep. Jesus had to bring the reality of the situation into focus with his, ***"Get behind me, Satan. You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."*** Peter was, at that moment, working for Satan. He was doing the devil's

bidding. Did he know it? Did he recognize or realize what he was doing? Does it really matter? Think about it. When the under-shepherd fails his flock, does it really matter to the flock if he did it on purpose or not? When the Wolf is slaughtering your brothers and sisters – or chewing on you – and the hired hand stands idly by, comforting you with soothing words about "choice" and "alternate lifestyle" and "tolerance and understanding" and "many bridges to God" does it really matter whether or not he himself believes what he is telling you?

The most disturbing aspect of all this is that the problem often only reveals itself when the wolf is already chewing on you. All is well when all is well. It's often only when the Wolf shows up at your door that the hired man abandons the flock – the flock he was supposed to be watching over and guarding with his very life. The hired hand has no desire to fight the Wolf. He believes he can make friends with him. He's been convinced – or maybe he has convinced himself – that evil really isn't all that evil, or that the danger has been exaggerated by those who are less enlightened.

So how are we to avoid such calamity? How do you avoid the hired man? Jesus doesn't make us guess. In the verses preceding our text he told us to listen carefully for his voice. The sheep follow Jesus *because they know his voice*. This is exactly why God's Word is so critically important to us. The true under-shepherd doesn't speak with his own voice. He recognizes that his own personal opinions are not worth the air it takes to voice them. He also realizes that he has been given the amazing responsibility to speak with the voice of Jesus. If he does not speak exactly as Jesus spoke, ***"teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you,"*** then do not follow. He is not an under-shepherd; he is a hired hand. Whether aware of it or not, he is working for the Wolf.

Our course of action actually then becomes rather simple and straightforward: *Follow only the Good Shepherd*. Jesus is unique in every way, but especially in his role as Good Shepherd. Stop and think for a moment of how it would have done no good for us to have Jesus simply die defending us. A shepherd who dies defending his flock is a failure to his flock. The Wolf will still destroy them. Jesus was different. In our text he tells us that he not only ***"laid down his life for the sheep,"*** he also ***"took it up again."*** Jesus Christ died on Calvary not because the wolf or his hired men overpowered him, but because he resolved to give up *his* life that *we* might live. He then ***"took up his life again"*** when he rose from the dead on the third day. There is therefore nothing at all left to condemn us but unbelief; that is, rejecting the sacrifice Jesus made as the full payment for our sins. What else

could condemn us? Sin? Not any more. **"The Lord has laid on him (on Jesus) the iniquity of us all."** Romans 8:1 **"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in (believe in) Christ Jesus."** We need never again fear death and hell, for the one thing that separated us from our God was removed when Jesus carried out sins to the cross.

This is the Good Shepherd that we have. This is what he foretold in our text when he said that he would **"lay down his life for the sheep...and take it up again."** Our Good Shepherd chained the Wolf to the foot of the cross.

This would be enough, wouldn't it. To have and enjoy the assurance of a blessed Life after death would be enough all by itself. Jesus offers us more. When he calls himself the Good Shepherd he is also telling us that he will never forsake us. No *good* shepherd ever would. So too before ascending into heaven again he told us, **"I am with you always; to the end of the age."** Death and hell have been conquered for us, but still our Lord Jesus is our Good Shepherd.

Does that mean that life in a sinful world will always be easy? Obviously not. If you have ever taken your child in to get vaccinated, or pulled a sliver out of his hand, or held her while the doctor stitched up a cut or set a broken arm - then you know that true love and caring sometimes hurts. Sometimes it hurts a lot. Jesus is our Good Shepherd. Unlike human guardians, Jesus knows exactly what is best for our eternal welfare. He is our good Shepherd. The same Jesus who would suffer even death on the cross and abandonment by his Father in our place as our Substitute would never allow us to suffer even a moment longer than is necessary for our spiritual good.

Therefore take to heart that precious passage in Romans 8:28: **"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."** Having a Good Shepherd therefore means that we can thank our God even for the hard things he allows to come into our lives. We can thank him while we sign for that repair bill, check into the hospital, hold a crying loved one. It means that we can thank him with equal gratitude for the sorrow and for the joy; for the times of plenty and for the times of shortage; for the times of sickness and for the times of health. Come what may, because we are sheep that enjoy a Good Shepherd, we can and should say, **"Thank you Lord. I know that you love me and that you have something a plan for my good. While I don't pretend to always understand, I trust you, and I offer you my humble and heartfelt thanks."**

Our Good Shepherd wants us with him in his paradise. He will allow whatever is necessary to get us there. Be content under his perfect care. That is what it means to be a sheep, and to live under a Good Shepherd. Amen.

## Scripture Readings

<sup>ESV</sup> **Acts 4:1-12** And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, <sup>2</sup> greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. <sup>3</sup> And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. <sup>4</sup> But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand. <sup>5</sup> ¶ On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, <sup>6</sup> with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. <sup>7</sup> And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" <sup>8</sup> Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, <sup>9</sup> if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, <sup>10</sup> let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead--by him this man is standing before you well. <sup>11</sup> This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. <sup>12</sup> And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 John 3:16-24** By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. <sup>17</sup> But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? <sup>18</sup> Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. <sup>19</sup> ¶ By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; <sup>20</sup> for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. <sup>21</sup> Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; <sup>22</sup> and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. <sup>23</sup> And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. <sup>24</sup> Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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**The Third Sunday after Easter – April 26, 2015**

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 783 (Verses 1-3) (Brown Hymnal)

"Jesus Shepherd of the Sheep"

## The Order of Service – Hymnal page 15ff. (Red Hymnal)

## The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**The Old Testament Lesson:** (Acts 4:1-12) Note in particular two things about this reading. First, that Peter spoke by the power of the Holy Spirit. He not only therefore spoke truth, but the authority of his words makes them applicable for us today as well. Second, note the exclusivity that God the Holy Spirit wanted Peter to communicate to the people. There are not many paths to heaven; there is but one – faith in Jesus Christ.

**The New Testament Lesson:** (1 John 3:16-24) John here reminds us that a living faith will always produce the fruits of faith or good works. While we know that such works do not save us, they do serve as a barometer of the condition of our faith. A faith that produces no fruits is dead; it is not faith at all. The importance of a right understanding here cannot be overemphasized. Works are not necessary for salvation, but works are necessary, since a living faith always produces fruits.

## The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 22. (Red Hymnal)

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 368 (Red Hymnal)

"The Lord My Pasture Shall Prepare"

## The Sermon – Text: John 10:11-18 (Printed on the back of this bulletin)

**"What It Means to Have a Good Shepherd"**

## The Offertory – (Hymnal page 22)

## The Offering followed by the Prayers

## The Pre-Communion Hymn – 304 (Verses 1-5) (Red Hymnal)

"An Awe-full Mystery Is Here"

## The Preparation for Holy Communion (Red Hymnal page 24ff)

## The Distribution -Hymn 305 (Red Hymnal)

## The Nunc Dimittis (Red Hymnal page 30)

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn – 783 (Verses 4-5) (Brown Hymnal)

"Jesus Shepherd of the Sheep"

## Silent Prayer

**Welcome!** - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune** – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

## Attendance - Sunday (49) Average (50)

### This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	–Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service w/communion
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship and coffee time
	<b>-11:30 a.m.</b>	– Church Council Meeting
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>-6:00 p.m.</b>	– Confirmation Class
	<b>-7:00 p.m.</b>	– Mid-Week Bible Study
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship and coffee time

**ILC News** – Trinity of Watertown, SD has called Pastor Paul Krause. Teacher Sherman Carstensen has returned the call of Gethsemane of Spokane, WA and has accepted the call to Faith of Markesan, WI. Messiah of Eau Claire has called 2014 Teacher Graduate Naomi Bernthal.

**Church Council Meeting** – The Church Council of St Paul is scheduled to meet this morning following the fellowship time.

**Confirmation Class** – Confirmation Parents please note the Wednesday schedule for Confirmation Class this week.

**Earthquake in Nepal** – Though the damage and loss of life is significant from the recent earthquake in Nepal, so far it appears that the members of our CLC affiliated congregations, together with their buildings, there were spared. We thank our God for his ongoing protection.

**CLC Youth Conference** – Information is available on the entry table for this summer's Youth Conference, hosted by Immanuel of Mankato. The conference is intended for high school aged Christians and is scheduled for July 28-August 2. Please see the Pastor for more information.