

"Sheep of the 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, their Savior, their Good Shepherd. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

Our Lord refers to us as sheep. Sheep are stupid. Sheep get into trouble. They're slow learners and more or less defenseless. 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 most are focusing almost exclusively 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.

This doesn't offend us; it teaches us. It enlightens and instructs us. In the best possible sense, it puts us in our place. It reminds us, for example, that as sheep we are 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 not only of what it means to have a Good Shepherd but why we need one, and the comfort that is ours because we have the very best. The text that will guide and instruct us is found in John's Gospel, the Tenth Chapter:

^{ESV} **John 10:11-18** *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² 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. ¹³ He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸ 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."

This is God's Word, 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 in life that demands our attention. It's a great blessing to have a few "sure things" that we just know will be taken care of without our intervention. So we take certain others for granted. We do this with man, we do this with God. We do this *especially* with God. The reason is obvious. When is the last time God 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, for example, **"sends rain on the just and on the unjust."** That means that God's gifts do not depend on our thanks and our prayers, 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 him and his goodness for granted. In the Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer, for example, we are taught to pray: **"Give us this day our daily bread."** He did not say, "Give us this week" or "...this year" 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 not the clean and cuddly creatures we see in pictures, but our Good Shepherd says, *"I love the sheep."* Sheep are also amazingly stupid creatures. Sheep, so we are told, will wander off the edge of a cliff simply because the sheep ahead did it. A fellow pastor once 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 then forget to flee when danger threatens. We seldom 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 peril.

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 (our) own foolishness. Again, that's us. More specifically, that's *me*.

Perspective is critical here. Fly over mountains at 30,000 feet and the mountains seemed tiny. From that perspective you get a very misleading idea of where you stood in relation to those "tiny" mountains. Drive through some of those same mountains and look up in awe as they tower above you. Those same mountains make you feel small. So too when we look down at sheep and their foolishness, we naturally tend to feel superior, but how it all changes on the ground when we realize that we are the sheep.

This is part of what Jesus was telling us in the words of our text for this morning. We are the sheep, and we not only desperately need *the* Good Shepherd, 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 the wolves will surely come. 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."

Being part of the right flock is also vitally important. The Good Shepherd, knowing how sheep love to follow other sheep, told us to separate from those that wander from the sure and certain voice of the Good Shepherd. 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, and the flock itself refuses to run.

So how are we to avoid such calamity? In the verses preceding our text, our Good Shepherd 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. True under-shepherds don't speak with their own voices. They recognize that their own personal opinions are not worth the air it takes to voice them. They are to speak always and only with the voice of Jesus. If they do not speak exactly as Jesus spoke, ***"teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you,"*** then do not follow. They are not under-shepherds; they are hired hands. Whether aware of it or not, they are working, at least part-time, 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 the wolf's 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 our 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 broke the power of the Wolf. He broke the chains of sin and death and set us free.

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 splinter 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 our Good Shepherd's amazing promise 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 planned for my good. While I don't 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's the comfort of being sheep, and living under the care and protection of the Good Shepherd. Amen.

ESV **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, ² greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. ³ And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. ⁴ But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand. ⁵ ¶ On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, ⁶ with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. ⁷ And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" ⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹ if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. ¹² 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."

ESV **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. ¹⁷ 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? ¹⁸ Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. ¹⁹ ¶ By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; ²⁰ for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. ²¹ Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; ²² and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. ²³ 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. ²⁴ 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.

ESV **John 10:11-18** I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² 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. ¹³ He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸ 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."



ST PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: www.bismarcklutheran.org

Mick Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist
Michael Roehl, Pastor

The Third Sunday after Easter – April 21, 2024

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

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

"Jesus Shepherd of the Sheep"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

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

The First Lesson: (Acts 4:1-12) Note two things in particular 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.

Psalm 23 (Supplement page 36) (Brown Hymnal)

The Second 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 Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown 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 page)

"Sheep of the Good Shepherd"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 784 (Brown Hymnal)

"Lord, Take My Hand and Lead Me"

The Prayers

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 Holy Communion – In obedience to God's Word, we practice "Close Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting anyone 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 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, not in judgment of anyone's Christian faith.

Attendance – Sunday (40) Average (43)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Monday	-6:00 p.m.	– Church Council Meeting
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – A summary of the recent CLC Board meetings in Eau Claire will soon be available. Please see Pastor Roehl if you would like a copy. Teacher Ann Sprengeler has accepted the six-month teaching call to Grace of Valentine. Messiah of Eau Claire has called Teacher Neil Bernthal. Grace of Sleepy Eye has called Pastor David Ude. Teacher Katie Naumann has returned the call to Luther Memorial of Fond du Lac.

Church Council Meeting – The Church Council is scheduled to meet tomorrow evening at 6:00 pm.

Regular Schedule Resumes – Our regular midweek schedule resumes this week, with Confirmation Class at 6pm and Midweek Bible Study at 7pm. Please consider making Midweek Bible Study part of your regular weekly routine. The more that attend, the better the study.

Women's Retreat – As previously announced, St Paul is hosting the CLC Women's Retreat in September. Since space considerations means that applicants may need to be turned away, please sign the registration sheet on the mailbox table as soon as possible if you would like to attend.