

John 10:11-18
“The Good Shepherd and the Sheepdogs”
Sunday April 22nd, 2081



The image of Jesus Christ as “The Good Shepherd” is a powerful and comforting image. It recalls to most people’s minds the most popular Psalm, Psalm 23. “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want,” which we spoke together today. Both those within, and without, the church, draw comfort and strength from this image of God as “the Good Shepherd.”

On a first grade Sunday School classroom window, I once saw a child’s interpretation of the first verse of psalm 23. It simply said, “**The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be wanted.**”

Immediately, when I read this I laughed, because if one indeed follows Jesus Christ, you generally won’t have any warrants out for your arrest. But as I read it again, I realized that sentence could mean that child was feeling unwanted by God.

But how extremely far from the meaning of the John passage we read today and indeed that of Psalm 23. God wants us so much that He became the human being, Jesus Christ, and then He died for us.

It takes great love to die for someone. It takes greater love to die instead of someone else, which is what Christ did for us. He died our death, because of our sin. He took the death penalty for us for our sin. Great indeed is the love God has for us!

Now we can all think of examples and instances of people dying for others: soldiers sacrificing themselves for others in battle, mothers dying for their children, and even more importantly, mothers giving of their lives day after day for their children.

But Jesus stands in a unique position to all those who follow his example of self-sacrificing love. He is the only one who could both give up his life and die and then take his life back up again and live. As he says in verse 17, “I lay down my life in order to take it up again.” And again in verse 18, “I have power to lay it down and also power to take it up again.”

Jesus Christ, God incarnate, God made man, has been the only person so empowered to do this and he did it on our behalf. Now this makes Jesus Christ *the* only Good Shepherd. He wasn't just “a” good shepherd. He was “The Good Shepherd” through laying down his life and taking it back again.

Now the first hearers of Jesus' words would have caught something, which to them would have seemed silly, or even mad. In fact, in the verses just after what we read today, some called Jesus mad and many quit following him.

Here's what they would have thought was crazy: no “good shepherd” would have died for his sheep on purpose, which is what Jesus was saying he would do. Just think about it. If a shepherd deliberately died for his sheep, the sheep would soon become mutton! Leaderless, unprotected sheep would soon become lunch for wolves, bears, lions and wandering Palestinians!!

Jesus, though, was trying to deeply impress in his hearers the deep love of God for them. Jesus and God's love was deeper than “hired hands” who when danger approached would run away. Hired hands watched sheep only for their own economic benefit and really didn't care about the sheep, because they didn't own them. The sheep weren't really theirs.

But Jesus is The Good Shepherd who says, “I know my own and my own know me.”

Now I must admit I really have no experience with sheep and shepherding, besides a few sheep I would pick up each year for the Live Nativity at FUMC of Mesa, and some very tasty legs of lamb.

But what I am told is that sheep, like dogs, know their master's voice. They don't follow anyone else. Sheep also have to be led, not driven like cattle. Sheep scatter easily and tend to get lost if pushed or driven.



That's why in verse 10 it says, **“and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.”** When chased or pushed or driven sheep simply scatter.



But sheep will follow their leader even if the leader jumps over a cliff.

Some claim sheep are dumb, very dumb. Other say they are simply stubborn and loyal. I would rather like to see them as **stubborn and loyal**, for that is what I highly value in church members: stubborn loyalty.

Now if you hang with church members long enough, eventually you'll get your feelings hurt. I guarantee it. We are all sinners and I believe it is part of the testing we receive here on earth when we irritate each other. But practice stubborn loyalty—be sheepish—and you will overcome and receive a blessing.

Anyway, what this scripture is saying is that there is a relationship between Jesus Christ and those who following him. There is an unmistakable relationship, a personal relationship that saves.



When we become part of Jesus' flock, through belief, we enter the flock through a personal relationship with him. Our individual confessions of faith collect us into one flock. **We are not Christian without Christ and each other.**

We are called to know Jesus, to know God's voice in Jesus Christ. Not as an historic figure, knowing the facts of his birth, life and teaching, but knowing him as we know our best friend. To know Jesus, to know God, is to establish a relationship, not memorize a bunch of doctrines about God; such as he is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent (i.e., all powerful, knowledgeable and present).

In the video tape we found and played showing the groundbreaking for this worship center many people pointed out they could hear Marlin Bolar singing. He has a beautiful and distinct voice and we know that voice!

Knowing the voice of God is something we are given and something we are taught to recognize. We know and are taught to recognize God's voice as Samuel was in the Old Testament. He had the tutelage of old Eli to tell him it was God who was calling his name. It was old Eli who taught Samuel to respond to God's voice and say, "speak for your servant is listening."

In my huddle groups part of what I teach is how to hear the voice of God in everyday life, how to recognize Kairos moments.

This brings us to sheepdogs. Did you notice, despite the title of my message, that there are no sheep dogs in this story of Jesus? The sheepdogs are a later addition by me to make a point.

You see, we begin as little lambs in the church, learning the basics of faith, belief and worship. We learn to respond to God's voice through prayer, scripture study, song and service. Eventually, we grow up and become sheepdogs. Not sheep—but sheepdogs. Sorta like a caterpillar turning into a butterfly. For eventually, we all—from lay persons to clergy alike—must help The Good Shepherd gather and tend to his sheep.

If we grow up to simply be sheep (and in a real sense we are always Jesus' lambs), our faith turns inward. We become "hired hands", seeking only "what's in it for me and my own?" and we really don't care for the rest of God's sheep. We want to be cared for only and care for no others. When times get tough, or we don't like something that the

church has done we run away. We become the hired hand in Jesus' story.



And when we turn inward, thinking the church and salvation and fellowship is all for me, the fellowship of the church becomes a stale sheep pen with no new members and members so focused on each other that they forget to recognize the Good Shepherd's voice in the stranger in our midst.

A good shepherd, a good sheep dog fights for the flock to the end.



What Jesus is calling us to do is to become part of the fulfillment of his prophecy in verse 16, **"I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock and one Shepherd."**

These words were spoken to those present with Jesus and were a prophecy that Christianity would break out of Judaism and call us and others into Jesus' flock—the Church.

Jesus here is inviting us to become the instruments of the fulfillment of that prophecy. To reach outward into the world and invite in others who will recognize Christ's voice and enter in.

A woman named Karen Stewart tells a delightful story of the "the neighborhood" German Shepherd when she was a child. When children came to play in her yard the German Shepherd would show up and prowl around the edges of the yard to keep any children from straying away. If any got too close to the street the dog would nudge them back.

Jesus wants us to be sheepdogs and go out in the world looking for the stray sheep, the lost lambs and invite them, nudge them in and then tend to them.

Now tending sheep consists of more than just looking for the lost. You must feed the sheep and tend to the weak, injured and infirm.

At Vista Church we try to do this. We have worship for your soul. We have multiple fellowship events like today's potluck and kite flying. We have dinner for 6 for fellowship that concludes this season today.

We have the Stephen ministers who minister one on one and visit in hospitals and nursing homes. We have Sunday School classes and are looking to start more.

We sponsor extensive mission projects and yesterday we were in Agua Prieta Mexico to celebrate 3 young people graduating from college the first in their families. Through Faith and education you and the efforts of the Fuente de Vida Methodist church; we together have transformed a ghetto area into a thriving community.

We are working on our Live Streaming worship ministry to reach out and eventually create new Satellite Fellowships—new churches—in direct response to Jesus' prophecy and call in verse 16, **"I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd."**

We are going to be the sheepdogs sent out to gather in new flocks. In preparation at least 2 our members Jim and Dr. Bill are studying to become Lay Ministers in the UMC. They along with many of you will be sheepdogs for Christ. I encourage others to consider being trained to be a Lay Servant, or a Lay Speaker, or a Lay Minister.

I have great Good News! **Our Annual Conference has giving us a \$50,000 grant to bring these new Satellite Fellowships into existence!**

Now are we completely adequate to the task? NO! There's only one Good Shepherd totally adequate to the task. But even though we

may feel we're not shepherds, or sheepdogs, we still can do the job of shepherding for we follow the Good Shepherd.



In a moment I'm going to show you a very non-kosher sheepdog. It is actually a sheep pig from the movie Babe. To work in the church and follow the will of God we often feel we are not only the wrong person in the wrong job, but even maybe the wrong species, in the wrong contest taking care of the wrong people, but Christ makes us adequate for the task.

As I and many others have said, **“God doesn't choose the gifted. He gifts the chosen!”** In the movie “Babe” farmer Hoggett, found his pig was good at herding sheep, so he entered the pig in a shepherding contest. Let's see how Babe did in the contest, which began with the jeers and laughter of the crowd.

ROLL TAPE: <https://youtu.be/0zHmeTeLgMY> End-at 2 minute mark.

Earlier in the movie, Babe had tried to shepherd the sheep by being mean. He found that kindness, care and respect are what counted and what worked. Again, sheep need to be led not pushed.



As we get ready to go out and invite people into the flock of Jesus, we will do it with the same care, kindness, respect and compassion as the Good Shepherd.

When you know the Good Shepherd and listen to his voice he will make you into a good sheepdog, or sheep pig, or better yet **just you**.

So today I invite you to know Jesus if you don't already know him and know you are wanted and he cares. And he has sheep that are not here today that he wants you to tend.

What indeed is God saying to you and what are you going to do? In Jesus' Name, amen.