

Pentecost 5

July 9, 2017 – 9:30 a.m.

Rev. Todd Goldschmidt, Pastor

Theme: Jesus Is “The Good Shepherd”!

Sermon Text: John 10:11-21

¹¹ “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³ The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

¹⁴ “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. ¹⁷ The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to 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 authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”

¹⁹ The Jews who heard these words were again divided. ²⁰ Many of them said, “He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?” ²¹ But others said, “These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”



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Of all God's creatures, great and small, sheep are some of the most vulnerable and dim-witted. Consequently, shepherding can be an extremely trying profession. Given the choice, most people would avoid it if possible. Which is exactly why David shepherded his family's flocks—he was, after all, the youngest of eight sons. Shepherding is solitary work. A herder may go for weeks with no contact with the "outside world" and no companionship other than his flock. Lethargy can set in. No wonder parents tell their children to count sheep when they can't fall asleep!

Sheep are absolutely dependent on the shepherd. They rely on him for protection from predators and other potential perils. Shepherds need to constantly guide their flock and rescue strays with their rod and staff. When a sheep wanders off and gets stuck in a gulch—which happens frequently—the shepherd must search for it, find it, extract it from its predicament and compel it to return to his protective care. If it doesn't, it'll die by exposure to the elements, lack of food, a fatal fall or become breakfast for a ravenous carnivore. But a good shepherd won't give up on *any* sheep, no matter how senseless or headstrong, until he has it safely back with the rest of the flock. That's the nature of a strong, resourceful, caring shepherd like Jesus, the great Good Shepherd of wandering sheep like us.

The picture Jesus uses to define His bond with us may seem foreign to us, but it was a vivid image to His hearers. He vowed that no matter what their quandary, He'd take the initiative to keep them safely in His fold; that regardless of their weakness, their welfare was His #1 priority. The sheep-shepherd bond is a comforting and compelling picture of the relationship we enjoy with our Good Shepherd, Jesus. The next time you're overwhelmed by stress or stuck in a rut, remember that Jesus has you in the palm of His merciful hands—hands that He willingly let His foes pierce with nails to affix Him to a cross so He could suffer and die out of love for you. Again this morning He reassures us **"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."**

Jesus rendered the full payment to God for our seditious thoughts, words and deeds. He also paid for the many times we've failed to do what God asks of us. Reflect on the anguish Jesus **"endured"** at the hands of **"sinners"** (Heb. 12:3). He persevered thru intense physical pain. But the greatest pain He experienced was when His Father—*God the Father*—forsook Him while **"he bore our sins in his body on the cross"** (1 Pet. 2:24). We deserved to be abandoned by God to everlasting punishment in hell, tormented forever by Satan and his demons, for we **"are by nature objects of"** God's **"wrath"** (Rom. 9:22). And yet when the midday darkness lifted on that Friday afternoon, Jesus cried out confidently, **"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit"** (Lk. 23:46) before He bowed His head and breathed His last. Jesus says, **"The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life"** for the sins of all people. That's also why He loves you and me so very much! To that end, the Apostle Paul wrote in **Romans 5:8: "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** What amazing love!

Incredibly, Jesus chose our eternal welfare above Himself every moment of His earthly life! He never once opted for the easy way out! So, He states: **"No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."** Twice John tells us that

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Jesus' enemies couldn't seize Him, **"because his hour had not yet come"** (John 7:30). Jesus had 100% control over the timing of the events that would culminate with His Passion. The timetable was established in eternity, each moment scripted by God. Hundreds of O.T. prophecies predicted the subtlest details about the Person and work of the coming Messiah, and Jesus fulfilled every nuance of them all—up to, and including—His pledge to rise again from the dead! When the mob came to arrest Him in Gethsemane, Jesus knocked them to the ground twice with His word. And He told Pontius Pilate, **"You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above"** (John 19:11).

Jesus distinguishes Himself from false prophets who **"come to [us] in sheep's clothing, but inwardly ... are ferocious wolves"** (Matt. 7:15). By way of contrast, He states: **"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep."** The **"hired hand"** has no vested interest in the sheep except to fleece them for his own profit. So, at the first scent of danger, He skedaddles as fast as his feet can carry him. He really doesn't care what happens to the souls of the people he's manipulated for his own material gain. All he cares about is saving his own sorry hide. But our **"good shepherd"**—Jesus—*does own* the flock, for **"with [His] blood he purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation"** (Rev. 5:9b). His vowed to His fledgling flock as He ascended into heaven, **"Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"** (Matt. 28:20) when He'll return to take us home to heaven!

Our **"good shepherd"** asserts: **"I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd."** We're the **"other sheep that aren't of [the] sheep pen"** of Israel. But we're no less redeemed than they are thru the work Jesus did in our behalf. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we **"too ... listen to [Jesus'] voice"** as fellow **"sheep"** of His **"one flock"** and faithfully follow our **"one"** and only **"shepherd."** Thru the prophet Isaiah, Jesus spoke some of the most comforting and encouraging words in Scripture: **"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass thru the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass thru the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior"** (43:1b-3a).

Even **"through the valley of the shadow of death,"** (Ps. 23) we follow Jesus, our great Good Shepherd, because we know that He successfully traversed that vale before us, paving the way for us to pass through it unscathed by the ravages of death. He promised Mary and Martha and all who are led by the Spirit to put their hope and trust in Him: **"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die"** (John 10:25-26) the death they deserve in the dungeons of hell.

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In heaven, our Good Shepherd will bestow on us **“the crown of life”** He earned for us and promises to give to everyone who **“loves him”** (James 1:12). Follow Jesus, your great Good Shepherd, fellow sheep wherever He leads you in life! Serve Him gladly in gratitude for His amazing grace! Honor Him as your Lord and Savior with the choices you make in life! Follow Him home to the ever-green pastures of heaven where you can drink forever from the crystal-clear **“river of the water of life”** (Rev. 22:1) everlasting! Amen.

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