



Easter 4 – Good Shepherd Sunday

April 22, 2018 – 9:00 a.m.

Rev. Todd Goldschmidt, Pastor

Theme: Jesus is *The* “Good Shepherd” of His Flock!

Sermon Text: John 10:11-18

Jesus said, 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.”

Three times in our text, Jesus states **“I am the good shepherd.”** Not a good shepherd. **The** good shepherd, who **“lays down his life for the sheep,”** unlike the **“hired hand”** who **“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”**—Satan—**“attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.”** Jesus’ hearers identified with this picture. Their agrarian society teemed with flocks and shepherds. The **“hired hand”** denotes Israel’s false teachers: the Sadducees manned the helm of temple worship and yet rejected everything supernatural, even the resurrection; and the **“teachers of the law and Pharisees,”** whom He denounced as **“hypocrites”** for **“on the outside [they] appear(ed) to people as righteous but on the inside [they were] full of hypocrisy and wickedness”** (Matt. 23:26b & 28)

The LORD appointed the descendants of Moses’ brother, Aaron, to serve as His priests. They were to adhere to every single law and ordinance He proscribed concerning the religious life of the people and oversee the sacrificial system He established. That system had two specific spiritual purposes for God’s people. The “law” aspect of that system was a grim reminder to the Israelites of their total inability to keep God’s moral law perfectly. Like us, they were innately sinful and stood in the need of God’s pardon. They brought **“sin offerings”** (Lev. 4:35) to the temple to demonstrate that they were truly sorry for the evil they’d thought, spoken and done. But the “gospel” aspect of the system was found in the shedding of blood when the animals were slain on the altar. That crimson flow recalled the blood of the Passover lamb—both the one sacrificed in Egypt and the One who would be sacrificed on a cross **“to take away the sin of the world”** (John 1:29).

“Jesus” is **“the good shepherd”** who willingly laid **“down his life for the sheep.”** Have you ever pondered precisely what Jesus endured out of love for you? Right out of the gate we think about His brutal suffering and death on Good Friday. But think about what it would’ve been like to exist from eternity! And not only to exist as some nebulous “Life-Force,” but to actually be the Source of life—**all life**—itself! The Creator became a creature, the Shepherd, a sheep, when the Son of God took on the frail flesh and blood of man! That’s what makes Him such a compassionate Savior, and understanding Shepherd for sheep like us who love to wander—often times straight into the gaping jaws of **“the wolf.”** The Bible uses other pictures from the animal kingdom to describe Satan, too. Peter wrote of him, **“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour** (1 Pet. 5:8). But by His death on Golgotha’s tree, Jesus set us free from Satan’s tyranny! By His resurrection, He delivered us from death and from everlasting suffering in the bowels of hell!

In our text, Jesus confesses, **“The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. 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.”** Jesus, of His **“own accord,”** allowed His enemies to arrest Him in Gethsemane’s olive grove, cart Him off to the high priest’s hall, mock Him mercilessly, falsely condemn Him, crucify Him and leave Him to die on the cross, exposed to the elements and to eyes of His friends and foes.

Please always remember and, I pray, that you never forget, that Jesus did all of that for you, personally, not because He **had** to, but because He **wanted** to. He did it all of His **“own accord.”** Amazing love, how can it be, that Jesus my Lord would die for me? Or for you? Or for anyone, for that matter? What unadulterated, incomprehensible, undeserved love! What truly amazing, mind-boggling grace!

Satan knows that, too. He’s a terrorist. He’ll try to hijack us from the path God has us on or hold us hostage for an unacceptable ransom that flies in the face of God’s will for us. His

mission is to steal our joy, terminate our lives and degrade our relationship with God—and, he's uber aggressive about it! If there's *anything* the devil can do to interrupt our abundant life, he'll give it the old college try.

In order to prevent that from happening, we need to keep our eyes of faith fastened on Jesus, our **“good shepherd,”** and our eyeballs glued to God's Word. That's where our Good Shepherd **“leads us in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.”** It's where He feeds us on the **“green pastures”** of His grace and slakes our spiritual thirst in **“the still waters”** of His wondrous love. Another awesome preventative measure we can take against the attacks of **“the wolf”** is to stay in close contact with our fellow sheep in Jesus' flock. There's strength in numbers—particularly as we **“encourage one another”** by **“meeting together”** (Heb. 10:25) to worship the Lord like we're doing right now. When we band together around God's Word and sacraments, we're declaring to others that for us, our closest interpersonal relationships occur within the safety of Jesus' sheepfold.

Satan, the terrorist, has one goal in mind: to lead us away from the care and protection of the Good Shepherd so that he can take us for a walk on the wild side or a stroll down easy street. He wants us to succumb to temptation so often that we convince ourselves there's no way Jesus could still love us or forgive us: we've sinned so much, so grievously that we've put ourselves beyond the pale of grace. At times, we sin intentionally despite the consequences. Have you ever considered the insanity of sin? Our Shepherd has blessed us with **“every good and perfect gift”** (James 1:17). He announced His gracious purpose for us when He said, **“I have come that [My sheep] may have life, and have it to the full”** (John 10:10). So why on earth would we, in our right minds, consciously reject the abundant life our Shepherd offers us in favor of a destructive fascination with sin?

That's insane, really, when you stop to think about it—right? But there's the rub: we rarely stop to think about it long enough to do what we need to do in order to prevent ourselves from jumping headlong into the same cesspool of sin we've swam in far too many times. And the outcomes are inevitable: a guilty conscience, shame and sometimes even self-loathing. We beat ourselves up over our bad behavior, vow that we'll *never* give in to that temptation again, breathe a sigh of relief, head on our merry way and then find ourselves right back at ground zero again in a very short period of time, ill-equipped to fight off Satan's same old lies.

My counselor is a huge fan of diaphragmic breathing. Along with prayer, it's his primary means of mitigating stress. Diaphragmic breathing slows down your **“fight or flight”** response long enough for you to collect your thoughts and choose how you're going to react to the stimuli that's stressing you out.

Prayer adds the dimension of turning stressful things over to the Lord and letting Him handle in the way that's best for you. The Lord always works in our best interests! The familiar **“Serenity Prayer”** also helps me sort out what's truly important in my walk of faith: **“God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”**

Listen again to Jesus' encouraging words: **“I am the good shepherd; 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.”** Nothing happens to us that's beyond Jesus' authority. He knows us, calls us by name and made us His blood-bought sheep! Isaiah wrote of Him, **“He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own**

way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (53:5-6). It’s for headstrong sheep like us that Jesus came!

What we see in the suffering and death of our **“good shepherd”** is God’s perfect justice. It’s exactly right because it’s exactly what we need. Jesus suffered and died not *in spite of* His innocence, but precisely *because of* it. Only Jesus could give God the obedience true justice demands. Only He could take the full measure of God’s wrath against sin. Only He could fulfill both God’s justice and His love. God always gets it right. God is perfectly just. Jesus is the proof—the proof of our forgiveness! We do well to imitate God’s justice. When we deal with one another on the basis of what we deserve, none of it is fair. We all deserve punishment. But if we treat one another in the light of God’s forgiveness, then we get it right. We get to give people what they need. We get to give them Jesus! And the Spirit may just lead them to **“listen to”** Jesus’ **“voice”** and become part of the **“one flock”** with **“one shepherd”**: our great **“good shepherd,”** Jesus Christ! Amen.