

Fourth Sunday of Easter – April 22, 2018
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

John 10:11-18 (NIV)

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12) The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns 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."

WE REALLY HAVE A GOOD SHEPHERD

In the name of our Good Shepherd fellow lambs;

Good Shepherd – that’s a wonderful name for a congregation situated as ours is in a somewhat pastoral setting. The name conjures up thoughts of peace, tranquility, and security. And, for those who are members of this Christian congregation it reminds us that we enjoy a wonderful relationship with our Lord – one that he describes as a relationship between a shepherd and his sheep. At times we get so caught up with ourselves, our problems, our worries, our limitations, our shortcomings, our mistakes and our failures that we forget all about the wonderful relationship we have with our Good Shepherd -- our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Take your eyes and your focus off yourself, off your problems, off your worries, off your limitations, off your shortcomings, off your mistakes, off your failures. Place your eyes and your focus on Jesus your good shepherd and you’ll have to say,

Theme: We Really Do Have a Good Shepherd: 1. He really knows his sheep 2. He really cares for his sheep

Jesus tells us, **"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep...I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me."** A. A. Milne’s well known character, Winnie the Pooh, describes himself as a bear of very little brain. The same could be said of sheep. They have the tendency to wander. They have the tendency to get themselves stuck in situations that they can’t get themselves out of. At times they don’t realize where they are going. They don’t keep track of where they’ve been, and they seldom see the need of returning to the point from which they started. And of course sheep aren’t among the fiercer animals either. They don’t have sharp teeth or claws to protect themselves. If somehow they end up on their backs with their legs up in the air, the danger is there that they won’t be able to flip themselves back over. They danger is there that they will ultimately die if someone doesn’t help them out. During thunderstorms sheep have been known to crowd into one corner of the sheep pen to the point that they actually smother and kill one another because they are so frightened and don’t know what else to do. They don’t know where else to turn. Does any of this sound familiar to you? It’s no wonder why Scripture often refers to us as sheep, not in the physical sense, but rather in the spiritual sense.

We might not like to admit it but we’re not always the brightest in regard to the choices that we make. We’re not the boldest in our battles against temptations. Spiritually we’re not among the fiercer creatures. Indeed we’re creatures, to quote Pooh, of very little brain.

At times we love to wander in search of the seemingly greener pastures that this world has to offer, even if it means leaving our Good Shepherd behind. At times we find ourselves in situations that pose great danger to our spiritual well being, temptations and situations that seek to rob us of our faith in our Good Shepherd. When

the many storms of life come our way, we sometimes huddle in the corner letting fear and worry control our lives and all sense of logic and reason seems to go out the window. Why do we allow these things to happen to ourselves? That's just it, too often we focus our eyes on ourselves and what's going on in our physical lives instead of focusing our eyes on our Good Shepherd and the promises that he makes concerning our spiritual lives.

Jesus said, **"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns 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."** In this world you will find all sorts of hired hands who care nothing for the sheep -- false teachers, false religions, false churches, false beliefs, false philosophies, people who are in it for themselves rather than the sheep, people who claim that they know you and what you need. But nobody knows you the way that your Good Shepherd does because nobody has been with you since the beginning the way that your Good Shepherd has. Nobody has the kind of investment in you that your Good Shepherd has. Placing your faith or your trust in anyone or anything else could have disastrous results when the wolf comes alluring. It could result in sheep being devoured or scattered from the flock of the Good Shepherd forever. The Good Shepherd knows his sheep. After all, he's been with you from the beginning. You've been through so much and your Good Shepherd has been with you and seen you through every time. That's why we can say with the psalmist, **"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."**

Are you the kind of sheep that has the tendency to wander, often finding yourself in situations that you shouldn't be in? Your Good Shepherd knows this and at times like these he uses the rod to discipline and correct his wayward sheep that insist on wandering away to bring them back to the fold. Are you the kind of sheep who is hurting, sick, weak or feeble? Your good shepherd knows this and at times like these he uses his staff to draw you closer to himself and give you the special attention that you need. It is said that when the sheep see the shepherd's staff they know that the shepherd is close by and this comforts them. It's the same with the Good Shepherd that we have in Jesus.

Your Good Shepherd knows you through and through, he knows you by name, he knows your case history. After all he was the one who called you to be his own. And you know him. You know his voice because you hear it in His Word. You know what he did to show you how much he cares for you. **"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 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."** Out of love for us, the Good Shepherd became one with the sheep. The Good Shepherd became the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The Good Shepherd became a substitute for sheep who deserved to be led to the slaughter. The good shepherd became the lamb who was led to the slaughter so that we never would find ourselves separated from him in hell.

In this ultimate sacrifice, an exchange was made. Our sins were placed on him. His righteousness was placed on us. Our sins were forgiven and heaven became ours. It was an investment that cost him his life, but it was an investment that he was willing to make because he knew what the result would be, sheep that would belong to him forever. If he loved us enough to make this kind of an investment in us, it only makes sense that he's also going to do whatever it takes to make sure that we remain his. There are things that a good shepherd will do for his sheep. When a sheep is hurting, a good shepherd will do what it takes to care. When a sheep has wandered off a good shepherd will do what it takes to find that sheep and bring it back to the fold. When sheep are hungry and thirsty a good shepherd seeks to provide the very best for his flock by leading them beside still waters and into green pastures, a good shepherd wants nothing but the very best for his sheep and that's exactly the kind of Good Shepherd that we have in Jesus.

In the Highlands of Scotland, sheep will often wander off into the rocks and get into places that they couldn't get out of. The grass on these mountains is very sweet and the sheep like it. Sometimes they will jump down ten or twelve feet to a grassy ledge. But they can't jump back again, ultimately the shepherd will hear them bleating in distress. They may be there for days, until they have eaten all the grass. The shepherd will wait until the sheep grow so faint that they cannot stand and then they will put a rope around the sheep, and he will go over and pull that sheep up out of the jaws of death. "Why don't they go down there when the sheep first jumps down to the ledge?" you might wonder? According to reports the shepherds know that the sheep are so foolish that they would dash right over the precipice and be killed if they did!"

And that is the way with many people; they won't go back to God till they have no friends and have lost everything. If you are a wanderer, I tell you that the Good Shepherd will bring you back the moment you have given up trying to save yourself and are willing to let Him save you His own way. He'll do whatever he has to for you sake because he really cares.

The name of our congregation is Good Shepherd – that name reminds us of the blessings we enjoy as members of the Lord's flock. But dear friends, Jesus isn't just our Good Shepherd – there are many who need him to be their Shepherd and Jesus is willing to be the Shepherd of all: **"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."** Jesus didn't wait for sheep to come to him. He actively sought out sheep and brought them into his flock. May we continue to do the same. When it comes to the work that we do, when it comes to the priorities that we set, may we continue to remain true to our name; true to our Good Shepherd, true to his voice as we continue to hear it and grow in it in his Word. As we do this, we will be blessed, and we'll just have to say: We Really Do Have a Good Shepherd. He really knows his sheep. He really cares. Amen.