

Prayer of the Day:

O Lord Jesus Christ, you are the Good Shepherd who laid down your life for the sheep. Lead us now to the still waters of your life-giving Word that we may abide in your Father's house forevermore; for you live and reign with him and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. Alleluia. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia. I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me. Alleluia. (John 10:14)

Sermon Text:

Good Shepherd Sunday, it's one of those Sundays in the yearly cycle of services that people seem to really enjoy. That picture of Shepherd and sheep, Shepherd and little lamb folded into His arms holding. We are the lamb. Jesus is the Shepherd. It's just comforting to the people of God. John chapter 10 is then the section of Scripture as we celebrate this picture of our Savior. In our three-year lectionary we divide it up into three sections and read one each year and as we do it cements the point home, **JESUS IS OUR GOOD SHEPHERD**.

However, as we open on this section, we are not greeted by such a warm and fuzzy thought. Jesus tells us that **THE GOOD SHEPHERD LAYS DOWN HIS LIFE FOR THE SHEEP**. He actually says that 5 times in our eight verses this morning. It seems kind of crazy, doesn't it? To die for sheep? I mean which is more valuable in the long run, sheep or shepherd? If the wolf or the lion were to devour devour the shepherd, well what do you suppose happens next to the shepherd-less sheep? These are all reasons that the hired hand runs. He sees very little value in the sheep. They simply aren't worth the sacrifice.

But this is not how the owner of the sheep sees the situation. The sheep are livelihood: The are food. They are clothing. They are money for goods and each holds value. In fact, if the flock is scattered, devoured or lost, well, no sheep, no shepherd. So, the one who owns the sheep has no problem standing between his flock and anything that may threaten them.

Perhaps it's time for a little honest assessment though. We just confessed our sins again, at the opening of our service. Now sheep aren't always the smartest of critters. They have a nasty tendency to focus only on their stomachs and so heads down moving clump to clump they get caught in thickets, wander from the safety of the fold, even fail to notice the threats around them. But at least the sheep prove valuable for the many reasons we mentioned before. But what value do we hold for God?

TEXT: John 10:11-18

11 "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."

That's what makes Jesus our Great Good Shepherd. Though in my sin, I can do nothing to earn my place in heaven, though as a sheep I love to wander from the fold and make my God my stomach or worse, though I simply fail to realize the dangers that lurk around every corner, God still cares for me. In our second lesson John blurts out his amazement for it all, *How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are* (1 John 3:1)!

To make us so, He must lay down His life for us, does lay down his life for us. As the wolves of our own sin encircled us, as Satan licked his chops with delight ready to pounce, as we cowered in the valley of the shadow of death, Jesus made His way to the cross. In His sacrifice, we are saved. Clothed in His perfection, we have all of the value that God demands of us. washed clean in His blood our enemies can no longer assault us. But Jesus shows us something else as well.

In verse 17-18, He tells us, *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.* This is why Good Shepherd Sunday is imbedded in the Easter season. In the brilliance of the empty tomb, we have the assurance that we are saved, the work of our Shepherd finished, just as He said and completely accepted by the Father in heaven. Because He lives, we live. Because He lives, we are saved!

Dear friends, fellow sheep, this message does not go without effect. *“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. 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.*

I'm told that sheep now the voice of their Shepherd. That while they may be only concerned with stomach and self, they quickly learn who is concerned about them. When God demonstrates His love for us in Christ. We take notice. Jesus knows us and we know Him.

You and I are those other sheep He speaks of scattered across continents and the gulfs of time. But by the grace of God, His voice is still hear, still present in Word and in Sacraments. And when it is preached, taught, heard in its truth and purity, the sheep come running, sometimes in droves, sometimes in trickles, sometimes in the victory of Christian funerals which lead to the lasting sheep pins of paradise in heaven.

This weekend we have a special opportunity as the people of God in our little corner of Christendom. 14 young men and women have completed their time in Catechism classes and have learned about the voice of their Savior. They have learned to recognize it and distinguish it from the many false voices in the world around them. Today they become communicant members of the flock, being convinced that the voice of Jesus is clearly heard in this place. More importantly, being convinced that their Good Shepherd, loves them, cares for them and stand besides them.

You see that's the comfort in this knowledge. We live in a world that leaves us wondering what the future will hold. We live in time when many things seem uncertain and shaky at best. The wolves dear friends, they are howling. But if we listen, we'll hear Him. The voice of our Shepherd, the voice of Jesus, it hasn't been silenced. It has already won the victory. It has never left. He stands beside us and in a world of unknowns, well **HE KNOWS HIS SHEEP** and because of His love and grace, **HIS SHEEP KNOW HIM.**

The Good Shepherd, it's one of those pictures that people seem to really enjoy. That picture of Shepherd and sheep, Shepherd and little lamb folded into His arms holding. It's just comforting to the people of God. Today the reminder, **THE GOOD SHEPHERD LAYS DOWN HIS LIFE FOR THE SHEEP** and the promise **HE KNOWS HIS SHEEP HIS SHEEP KNOW HIM.** Dear friends, we are the sheep and **JESUS IS OUR GOOD SHEPHERD.** Amen.