

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:

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."

Let's just get right to it this morning, shall we? In our Gospel lesson, Jesus tells us twice that He is the Good Shepherd and in that which follows, He explains why. As He speaks these words, He stands on one side of the cross and resurrection. As we read these words, we stand on the other. Jesus has laid down His life for the sheep, has picked it up again. Yes, Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia! Truly **OUR SAVIOR IS OUR GOOD SHEPHERD!**

"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.

I have never been a herder of actually sheep. However, from the reading I have done, shepherds play a pivotal role in the life of this woolen wanderer. They are there to protect and to guide. They offer protection when the predators come stalking an easy meal and they offer guidance as they lead them to safe and lush pasture lands where the sheep can do what they do best – eat. You see sheep by themselves are rather helpless creatures. They are rather unaware of their surroundings. Heads down as they focus on the grass which they are devouring, they are often oblivious to the dangers which may stand only feet from them. They will wander right into the thicket and become ensnared. They will wander into the jaws of wolves and be devoured. They will wander away from the safety of the sheep pen. They need their shepherds.

But Jesus doesn't say He's just any old shepherd. He qualifies it with the word translated "good". "Good" used here imparts the idea in the Greek of meeting all the requirements of something. Interestingly enough the word often used for sin in Scripture means to miss the mark while "good" is hitting the mark square on. Today, we might say that Jesus is our "Perfect or Sinless Shepherd". Not the money hungry hired hand who flees at the first sign of trouble, Jesus is there to use the rod and staff of His Word to shield us from harm and keep us from evil.

Oh, but then we just said something about ourselves didn't we? If Christ is the Good Shepherd, then you and I are the sheep. Helpless, unwitting, wandering nitwits who often have their heads down focused on the things in front of us instead of the danger which may and often does lurk only footsteps away from us. Is it that too harsh of a portrait to paint? Well have we ever been more concerned with game times than worship times? Have you ever found yourself more concerned about your diet and figure than your devotional life and the image which you display before your God? Have you ever found yourself pushing God's Word aside because it wasn't convenient, it didn't fit with your desires and the way your life was going or because you flat out decided that at this moment in time it would be more fun to be sinner than saint? Then you like me are a helpless nitwit, witlessly wondering from one blade of grass to another failing to understand that while this path may seem satisfying, the wolves stand only moments away licking their chops and delighting at the meal coming in their direction.

Thank God Jesus is not the hired hand. Thank God that He will stand and fight for you. Thank God that He was perfect for us when we were not. Thank God that He was willing to lay down His life as the perfect payment for every sin and every sinner. On the cross he offered the perfect sacrifice for wandering sheep. In the resurrection He provides the lasting promise of a perfect sheep pen, the glory of heaven for His people.

Ah, but this isn't all our Shepherd does for us. It would be pour care for the sheep of the pen if everyday guidance wasn't *supplied to them*. *The Shepherd doesn't watch the sheep in order to let the wander. So Jesus says, "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.*

Jesus our Shepherd knows us and He knows our needs. Sheep may be simple creatures, but they also know their shepherd. They know him well enough that they often will only respond to the voice of their particular shepherd. Heading only his commands. So it is with us and our Shepherd. He uses the rod and staff of His Word to hook us and pull from the danger, Law exposing the folly of our paths, Gospel setting us in the lush pasturelands of the sheep pen where wolf and thicket cannot be found. And He does it not only you but all of those other sheep He refers to here as well. He reaches out to our children, to our families, and friends, neighbors and acquaintances. Those who know Him listen to His voice, they know Him through faith and they follow after.

The why is easy. Sheep know the shepherd has been guiding them to good pasture lands, driving their enemies far from them and keeping them safe. The liturgical seasons of Lent and Easter have shown us in vivid detail what our Good Shepherd does for us. We watched in shamed silence and shocked sadness as the Good Shepherd allowed Himself to be treated like the sinful sheep giving us the reward He had earned in His perfection while trading us for the damnation we had deserved in our sin. On Calvary's cross He suffers and dies for us. With Mary our knees gave way at the tomb as Jesus spoke words of forgiveness telling us not to fear but rejoice for the payment was not only complete but accepted by the heavenly Father. God certainly has done it all for us. Keeping us safe, providing rich pasture land, defeating our greatest enemies.

It is because of who our Shepherd is and what He does that we will with every fiber of our being seek to follow and listen. That which made Pharisee and Sadducee hired hands who fled in fright was their desire to fleece the flock whether for power, pennies or praise. They were unconcerned with the Word of God. They had no intention of shepherding and guiding b the voice of the Good Shepherd. We will wander into the same trap if we lift our eyes from the Word. We will be devoured if we run away from our Savior's voice. Thanks be to God that through faith in Him, He guides and guards, lives, dies and rises again all for us.

No wonder Jesus repeats himself in our lesson today. **YES, OUR SAVIOR IS OUR SHEPHERD. HE LAYS DOWN HIS LIFE FOR THE SHEEP. HE KNOWS HIS SHEEP AND THEY LISTEN TO HIM.** Amen!