



from the desk of . . .
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I AM - 4

I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD

John 10:11-16

I wonder, how close have you ever come to sheep? ... Even though I grew up in the farm country of western PA, I really never had any contact with them.

My neighbors had cows & chickens & turkeys & pigs.

But then a few years ago Kathy & I went to Ireland. (For those of you who would like to remain after worship I'd be more than happy to show you about 5,280 pictures of that trip! ... But I digress.)

As we were driving across the southern tip of that beautiful island, there were sheep just everywhere, wandering across the highway.

We stopped at the Kissane Sheep Farm. Fascinating. We watched the sheep dogs run all over the hillside & herd the scattered sheep back into the fold.

We went into the barns & (X) Kathy fed the sheep & I sheared them. Good fun, good memories. And while this was a unique opportunity for us ... it would have been an everyday experience for Jesus' listeners.

So, Good News from Jesus, as recorded by John, to you who have gathered here this morning for worship.

Within your hearing comes the Word of the Lord ...
(VIDEO begin at 1:25:25 ... end at 1:26:21)

"I am the good shepherd, who is willing to die for the sheep. When the hired man, who is not a shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees a wolf coming, he leaves the sheep and runs away; so the wolf snatches the sheep and scatters them. The hired man runs away because he is only a hired man and does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd. As the Father knows me and I know the Father, in the same way I know my sheep and they know me. And I am willing to die for them. There are other sheep which belong to me that are not in this sheep pen. I must bring them, too; they will listen to my voice, and they will become one flock with one shepherd." (John 10:11-16)

May the Lord grant that we may engage in contemplating the mysteries of His Heavenly wisdom with really increasing devotion, to His glory and to our edification. Amen

There are over 500 references to sheep in Scripture. Sheep were a common thing in the 1st century, & as a result, Jesus' audience in Palestine had an easy time appreciating the role of a shepherd.

That's not the case for us in Rolling Meadows.

Now, the 2 greatest heroes of the O.T. were: Moses (the national deliverer), & David (the mighty warrior & king). Both of them had worked as shepherds for years & years. (Exodus 3:1; 1 Samuel 16:11)

And, not only were the greatest heroes of Biblical times shepherds,
but God Himself is depicted in Scripture as a shepherd.

The Psalmist cries out ... (X)

"Listen to us, O Shepherd of Israel;
hear us, leader of your flock." (The Psalms 80:1)

Isaiah writes of God ... (X)

"He will take care of his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs together
& carry them in his arms." (Isaiah 40:11)

Ezekiel, speaking the words of God, writes ... (X)

"I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep,
& I will find them a place to rest ...
I am a shepherd who does what is right." (Ezekiel 34:15-16)

So, shepherds were in good company, if their fraternity included Moses & David & God Himself.

And then when Jesus finally arrives on the scene,
His birth is announced by angels, 1st of all,
to a group of what? ... (shepherds) (Luke 2:9)

So, when Jesus boldly states ... "I am the good shepherd" ... there's no doubt in anybody's mind who He's claiming to be.

And He says it not once, but twice in today's passage.

Actually, in the original language His statement is even more pronounced. (ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλὸς ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλὸς)

"I am the good shepherd, the good one."

So, what does it mean for Jesus to be our shepherd? ...

We looked at some of His responsibilities last week when we saw that a shepherd lies across the opening of the sheep pen & becomes the gate.

He protects His sheep.

We're going to look at 4 additional things this morning.

1st, the shepherd **calls** his sheep.

"The man who goes in through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him; the sheep hear his voice as he calls his own sheep by name, & he leads them out. When he has brought them out, he goes ahead of them, & the sheep follow him, because they know his voice. They will not follow someone else; instead, they will run away from such a person, because they do not know his voice."

Last week we talked about a sheep pen that was located out in the fields. The shepherd built it out of rocks & would use it during good weather.

The sheep pen that we're talking about today is different. This one was located in the town or village. During the inclement months all the local shepherds would bring their flocks into this one common sheep pen & they would leave them there. Then, if the shepherds wanted to take their sheep out to graze during the day, they would come to the gate, & call to their sheep ...
 & their sheep would come!

Now I hear this & wonder how these sheep would recognize their shepherd's voice, come to the gate, & follow him out leaving all the other sheep behind? ...
 How come all the other sheep don't follow him? ...

Jesus tells us what everyone in His 1st century audience would have known as a fact ... sheep only respond to the voice of their own shepherd.

(Isn't this a wonderful illustration?)

The word "voice" is the key here,
 & Jesus uses it several times.

When I lived in Key West I had 5 indoor cats: (X) PC, Sarah, Leah, Ruth, & Naomi. (Good Scriptural names!) The house was always open, & people were coming & going all the time, but with the exception of PC, who was fairly social, no one ever saw my cats.

(You know the difference between a dog & a cat? When you call a dog it comes, when you call a cat, it takes your # & eventually will get back to you.)

People would call my cats by name; they would call "Leah" until they were blue in their face, but she would never come. They were not Leah's "shepherd."

(Believe it or not, she would come for me.)

My question is ... is Jesus your Shepherd? Whether He is or isn't can clearly be seen in your response to His voice. He has called you to follow Him. (Matthew 4:19) And if that's what you have begun to do ... you belong to Him.

But, if you've ignored His call, if you have a deaf ear to His voice, it's a good indication that you're not yet one of His "sheep". Because His sheep recognize His voice ...
& they respond.

During the course of the day do you have a sense that you're responding to the Shepherd's voice on a regular basis? That's a pretty clear sign of whether or not you really belong to His flock.

By the way, He's gone to great lengths to make you a member of His flock. One of Jesus' favorite parables is about a shepherd who leaves the 99 safely grazing sheep in order to go look for the one stray. (X)

And when he finds it he's so happy ... he carries it back to the sheep pen & then calls all his friends. He wants to celebrate the fact that the lost sheep has been found. (Luke 15:4-6)

That's how much Jesus wants us to be part of His fold.

When Jesus states ... "There are other sheep which belong to me that are not in this sheep pen" ... He's actually talking about us.

"I must bring them, too; they will listen to my voice, & they will become one flock with one shepherd."

Jesus is all about building a flock.

This congregation is His flock.

If someone thinks they're following Him but aren't actively participating in His flock ... they're kidding themselves. Following Jesus means not only **stepping out** of the world, but it means **stepping into** His community.

2^{ndly}, the shepherd **leads**. That's interesting, & it's not how I picture it. When I think of shepherds moving sheep I imagine the sheep being driven. The shepherd is behind them with a couple of sheep dogs barking & snapping at the heels of the sheep, pushing them along.

But in Jesus' day, it was customary for the shepherd to go ahead of the flock ... leading them. And to lead means to feed, guide, comfort, doctor, & discipline the sheep. Maybe the best way for us to appreciate those concepts is by looking at the 23rd Psalm.

Most of you know it. It begins ...

"The LORD is my ... (*shepherd*)."

This wonderful Psalm is filled with descriptions of what the sheep needs.

1st of all, leading involves **feeding**. Leading includes seeing to it that the sheep have food to eat.

If sheep are left too long in any particular pasture, it gets overgrazed, then the grass disappears, the land erodes, which brings on parasites which will be ingested by the sheep & infect them. So, a shepherd has to constantly keep his sheep on the move ...

leading them to one pasture after another.

And when a shepherd moved his flock to a new area he had to prepare it. That meant removing all the rocks. It meant making sure there was a source of water. It even meant sowing new seed so that old grass would be replaced. It meant weeding the entire pasture so there were no poisonous plants.

That's all part of "feeding" the sheep.

The 2nd part of leading is keeping the sheep pest free. It's relieving the sheep of their **irritations**.

Sheep can be driven to absolute distraction by flies & tics & gnats & mosquitoes. Sheep lose sleep over these pests. They stand on the feet ... stomping their legs ... shaking their heads ...

going to trees or bushes & rubbing up against them.

Sheep have been known to bat their heads on the ground trying to get flies out of their nose. So, they have to be regularly disinfected ... dipped or sprayed.

So, the shepherd takes a special oil mixture & shoves it up their nose to prevent flies from going in there.

In the 23rd Psalm, when we read, the shepherd "anoints my head with oil" ... it means that he's getting rid of the insects. He's taking care of the scabs on the sheep, the irritations.

The 3rd aspect of leading is that the shepherd is responsible for recovering **lost sheep** ... which by definition is every sheep from time-to-time.

One serious problem for sheep is that they will occasionally become "cast." (X) That term describes a sheep that has rolled over on its' back & cannot get up again by itself.

It can't get up because it's too fat, it's eaten too much, or because its' wool is dirty & matted & it's holding it down. Or it can't get up because the sheep just lacks the coordination to do it.

And if the sun is brutally hot on that particular day, gasses begin to work & circulation will stop & the sheep will die within a few hours' time.

So, the shepherd needs to regularly count his sheep.

And if he's missing one, he'd rush out to find it in order to beat the vultures. The shepherd straddled the sheep, lifting it,
& massaging its' legs to get the circulation going.

And if the sheep was still wobbly,
he'd have to carry it back to the rest of the flock.

A final aspect of leading means **disciplining** those sheep that repeatedly got themselves into trouble.

(Now this isn't one that strayed away once or twice, but one that was consistently going "astray".)

Sometimes the shepherd would actually break one of the sheep's front legs, & then he'd carry it around until the leg healed. And during that time, not only would the sheep be prohibited from wandering off,
but it would actually bond with the shepherd.

And so, by the time the leg was healed, & the sheep was put back on the ground ... it didn't want to go too far away. It wanted to stick close to the shepherd.

If we think about those things ... it's what our Good Shepherd does for us. We can identify with this can't we? ... We want to be fed. We go to our Shepherd because of the irritants of life; the things that bug us; the problems we face.

We stray off; we get ourselves in trouble ... often because we're fat & sassy. We've got so much materialism going on that we get ourselves separated from our Shepherd & He has to come looking for us. And if we're consistently troublemaking ...
then we need His discipline.

Jesus promises to do all that as our Shepherd.

So, when our Shepherd leads, will we follow? ... Do we keep our Shepherd in sight? ... Do we refuse to let Him out of our course of vision throughout the day? ...

I confess this is an area in my life that I'm continually working on. I want to make certain that every decision I make, every expenditure of money, every investment of time, every goal I set, every conversation I have ... is led by my Shepherd.

I want to be in touch with Him. I want to be reading His signals. I want to be following His path.

We have a great Shepherd, a good Shepherd. The challenge for us is how close are we following? ... Throughout the course of the day are we checking in with Him on a regular basis? ...

Are we seeking His direction? ...

Here's a 3rd quality ... the shepherd **sacrifices**.

If we had to pick out the dominant theme behind the Good Shepherd imagery ... this would be it.

The Good Shepherd is willing to die for the sheep.

This is the shepherd who understands that the sheep are completely dependent upon Him. This is the shepherd who understands that the sheep have no other line of defense. Sheep are unable to protect themselves.

Do you know what sheep do when they're in trouble?
They run ... & they're klutzy runners.

Philip Keller, (X) who was a shepherd, told the story where a friend came to visit him. And she brought her tiny Pekingese dog. This small dog yapped a couple of times & 200 sheep stampeded ...

so scared were they of that little puppy.

He wrote of another occasion when a cougar stalked his sheep. It never attacked a single one, but the next morning, there were 9 dead ewes.

They had literally become scared to death.

The good shepherd understands
that the sheep depend upon him for defense.

I grew up seeing Bible pictures (X) of mild mannered shepherds holding cuddly little lambs close to their chests. We need to get rid of that idea. These guys were not sissies.

They were tough men who regularly dealt with danger.

We read in Scripture of how David killed a lion on one occasion & a bear on another in order to protect his sheep. (1 Samuel 17:36)

Let me tell you something else about the shepherd who's willing to die for the sheep ... it's only the shepherd who has a **personal investment** in the life of the sheep that will **stick it out** when things go bad.

When danger occurs, it's only the shepherd that's personally committed to the flock that will remain.

Jesus describes the shepherd who has been hired for the job. "The hired man runs away because he is only a hired man & does not care about the sheep." He's going to take off as soon as things get tough. If this guy has to choose between his salary & his life ...
forget the money.

Interestingly, the rabbis of Jesus' day actually spelled out the legal requirements of a hired shepherd in a book of rules, called the Mishna. (X)

The Mishna taught that if one wolf attacked, a shepherd was required to stay & defend the flock.

But, if 2 wolves attacked, the shepherd could run.

When I read that I thought, "I bet there were a lot of shepherds who had trouble with double vision. The moment a wolf attacked they looked around & said,

'Hey, I think I see a couple more! ... I'm out of here.'"

Jesus states that He would never do that because His sheep belong to Him. He's not a hired man.

He will stay ... even if it costs Him His life.

A 3rd insight about the shepherd that's willing to die for the sheep is that he only risks his life for the sheep as a last resort.

The job of the shepherd was not to "die" for the sheep.

The job of the shepherd was to "live" for the sheep. If he did something stupid, risking his life, & lost it ... his flock would be left unguarded. So, we don't often hear about shepherds who had given their lives for their sheep.

If a shepherd actually did that he'd have to be certain that he was taking his adversary out in the process.

Okay, so what does that tell us about Jesus? ... Why did Jesus go to the cross? ... He didn't go to the cross to be a martyr. He didn't go to the cross to demonstrate, by way of example, how much God loves us.

Well, that may have been part of it.

The reason that Jesus went to the cross was to take out our enemy (X) ... the fiercest enemy of all.

(1 Corinthians 15:26)

Jesus literally threw Himself into the jaws of our enemy; He took the just punishment our sin deserves.

(Isaiah 53:6) If there was any other way, He would have taken it. As we were talking last week,

this is what makes Jesus completely unique. (The Acts 4:12)

If you want to know why He's the only way to God, it's because there's no other "shepherd" in history who has died for the "sheep". Jesus is the only one. He said,

"I'll take your place." (John 1:29)

Our Shepherd sacrificed Himself.

Here's a 4th activity of the shepherd. The shepherd **knows** his sheep. "As the Father knows me & I know the Father, in the same way I know my sheep & they know me." A shepherd & his sheep were unusually close.

They were literally together 24/7.

Now in 2018 we typically raise sheep as a food product. They end up at the butcher shop & become lamb chops or mutton roasts.

But in Jesus' day they were principally a wool source. So, a sheep would live for years & years & become "best friends" with the shepherd because they spent lots of time "hanging out" together.

Jesus said ...

"As the Father knows me & I know the Father, in the same way I know my sheep & they know me."

The theological point that Jesus is making here is not primarily that His sheep know Him & He knows His sheep, but that the model of the intimacy that He desires with us is the same sort of relationship He has with His Heavenly Father. Wow!

That thought just takes my breath away. Jesus is saying, "I want to be as close with you as I am with my Heavenly Father."

Jesus, the Shepherd, not only knows His sheep ...
He wants His sheep to know Him.

I want to conclude in a different way this morning.
 There's a couple of questions
 at the bottom of your outline.

"What is it that your Shepherd knows about you today
 that encourages you to know that He knows?"

Some of you might be encouraged by simply realizing
 that Jesus knows the stress that you under right now.
 Or, it's good to be reminded that He knows how lonely
 you feel today. Or, He knows how desperately entangled
 you are in this or that sin.

What is it that your Shepherd knows about you? ...
 You just need to remind yourself that He knows.
 I want you to come up with 2 of those.

And the flip side of the question is ...

"What do you know about your Shepherd
 that's a source of great comfort to you today?"

What have you learned about Him even this morning?
 (i.e. that the shepherd sticks with you,
 that he won't turn & run.)

I want you to come up with 2.

2 things your Shepherd knows about you ...
 2 things you know about your Shepherd.

Let's take a moment & do this & then reflect on them.

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