

Coming To Be Our Good Shepherd

John 10:1-15

November 23, 2025

Open your Bibles today to John 10. We're actually beginning our Advent series today even though it doesn't technically start till next Sunday. But next Sunday is youth Sunday and Christmas merchandise has been in the stores since September and since it's never too early to start looking for Jesus, I think we're Ok. For our Advent themes this year, we're going to be looking at various roles Jesus came to fill to understand more of Who He is and what He came to do, that we might love Him more deeply and follow Him more closely. So today's role reminds us of Jesus as our Good Shepherd.

Few things are any cuter than a little lamb. Nevertheless they're not very smart and occasionally one wanders from the fold. I read once of a sheep that got stranded on a narrow cliff in Scotland. It could not climb the steep 8 story cliff back up and there was nothing below but the deep blue sea. Eventually... we'll eventually find out. If you are able, please stand as we read about one of Jesus' roles from John 10:1 "I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. 2 The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. 3 The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." 6 Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them. 7 Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. 8 All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. 9 I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. 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."

Say shepherd. Jesus declares Himself here to be the good shepherd and this is the first of His roles we will consider. Although breeders of show lambs can make some

money today if they raise high quality stock, shepherds were not always so respected. In fact, throughout most of the Bible they were lowlives. They were the ones who couldn't find work anywhere else. When filling out job applications, shepherds invariably had to put, "no fixed address" because they roamed far and wide steering and guiding their flocks so that the sheep's main needs could be met: food, water, and protection. The Shepherds were like their sheep in that they too were dirty and smelly and unwelcome in most social functions. If you asked a little boy what he wanted to be when he grew up, he'd never say shepherd. Although God chose a shepherd named David to tend His people the Israelites, it did little to elevate the status of his occupation.

Shepherds were very common and how they cared for their flocks was often used to illustrate leadership for the Israelites. The first two of the 112 times the word shepherd is found in the Bible, it's where Jacob says God has been his shepherd throughout his life. And in the most well-known Psalm, David says the Lord is my Shepherd, and then describes all the things the Good Shepherd does for His flock.

Which brings us to sheep. Say sheep. Sheep are mentioned nearly 600 times in our Bibles. They were very common in Jesus' day and were the most important specie of livestock. Sheep were utility animals. While hogs were unclean and cattle required a lot of food and space, sheep were used for meat, as well as wool for clothing and tent fabric. Sheep also provided milk and skins that were tanned and used for many things including writing.

But sheep are notoriously stupid. Although he wasn't an animal scientist or a farmer, Martin Luther once said, "The sheep... cannot help himself, nor find pasture for himself, nor heal himself, nor guard against wolves, but depends wholly and solely on the help of another." And that another is their shepherd. Sheep have no defensive teeth or weapons. The rams can butt with their horns, they can stomp with their hooves, but their most common defense is running. A good run beats a bad stand. If sheep are going to survive in the wild, especially in that time and place, they had to be protected.

And they had to be led. Sheep like to be with other sheep. You may have heard about the teacher who was quizzing her students. She asked, "If you have 10 sheep and one gets out, how many do you have left?" Johnny said 0. No she said, and she repeated the problem and he repeated his answer. She said Johnny, you don't know your math. 10 minus 1 is 9. He said with all due respect, Mam you don't know your sheep. If one gets out, they all get out! They tend to follow the leader whether or not the wether knows where he's going. (A little sheep humor. A wether is a castrated ram.) Sheep are a bit like deer, if one bolts, they all bolt. Which is why they need shepherds! This isn't to say they always get along. The shepherd sometimes has to discipline bully sheep. He may have to use his rod to knock a rowdy ewe in the head to promote unity within his flock. May we submit to the shepherd's discipline and avoid His rod. A sermon for another day.

When my children were in school, I thought it would be good for them to learn some responsibility by raising and showing sheep. I've had some other bad ideas too. But we got some and with the help of Tom Kibler and the Coopers we put up a pen and started raising lambs. But Allen's would not lead. We put the rope around its neck and it just dug in. It was contrary and obstinate. I thought, I'll hook to our tractor and he'll have to follow. No he didn't. He plopped itself over on the ground and let me drag him up through the yard. I felt like dragging him to the slaughterhouse. Unlike some other children who cry when their lambs sell at the fair, there was no happier boy than Allen. He said he would have been glad to slit its throat himself. Aren't you glad Jesus is our Shepherd? He's patient and loves us even when we're obstinate and stubborn. Sometimes I've flopped over and God has had to drag me. Sometimes He's had to bop me on the head with His rod.

In the passage we read this morning Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd and as such identifies Himself as the promised Messiah. The Holy Spirit, speaking through Micah's lips 700 years before Mary got her baby bump named Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Messiah and Micah's prophecy was used by the priests to direct the Wise Men. But Micah also said this promised Holy One would shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord.

So the general expectation was that the Messiah, the Christ, would be a good shepherd as opposed to the bad shepherds called out by the Old Testament prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Zechariah, Ezekiel and others. These all criticized Israel's leaders who failed to shepherd God's people well. They were selfish and didn't care for their sheep, only themselves. They took advantage of Israel's flock. They foretold a time when the owner, that is God, would come Himself to shepherd His people. And that's exactly what Jesus did! And that's exactly why when He called Himself the Good Shepherd in today's passage, He was identifying Himself as the promised Messiah.

So to help us understand the metaphor, let's realize that in Jesus day, the shepherd spent more time with his sheep than with his own family. His sheep **were** his life. Morning, noon, and night. 24-7. He knew his sheep intimately and individually. They were not numbers and he didn't need ear tags to identify them. They became almost like personal pets. As such, the sheep learned to know their shepherds as well. They learned to know their smell, their shape, their moods, and their voice. Say voice.

Every person on earth has a unique voice. That's just another example of God's amazing creativity. We can identify people instantly by their voices. So can animals. Your dog does it and comes running. Your cat does it but never lets on. In Jesus day, several shepherds might use the same sheep fold for the night and in the morning when it was time to go out and find pasture, the shepherds would call their sheep and the sheep would collect around their shepherds whose voices they knew. They didn't need to brand

them like cattle in the west. Their ownership was obvious by their response to their shepherd's voice.

Oh my brothers and sisters, what a powerful lesson for us regarding the voice of our Good Shepherd, is it not? Do you know His voice? Do you know it better than the voice of your television? Of your social media? Than the voice of your job or hobby? Than your favorite entertainer? Than your favorite politician? Than even your own family? Or is it only vaguely familiar? I know I've heard it before, but I can't place it.

Awhile back at Nancy's work, one of the ladies that answered the phone didn't recognize the owner, Carl Harman, and so she said, "May I ask who's calling?" To which Carl replied, "The one who signs your paycheck!" Do you recognize the voice of the One who provides all your needs? Do you recognize the voice of your good Shepherd? Do you spend enough time with Him in prayer, in His Word, in quiet meditation to be able to hear His voice above all others and separate yourself from the other sheep and run straight to Him? Do you know His voice?

And then, having heard His voice, do we follow Him? Say follow. Down in verse 27, Jesus said His sheep know His voice and they follow Him. Luther said, "[the sheep] is superior to all animals in... that he ... hears his shepherd's voice and will follow no other. He is clever enough to hang entirely on his shepherd and to seek help from him alone." Oh Father, help us to be more sheepish in this way. Help us to follow Jesus' voice and not another's. Jesus, Help us know Your voice, to cherish your voice, to love your voice and to follow your voice. Unlike western shepherds who drive sheep from the back, middle eastern shepherds led from the front. And so does Jesus. He leads us beside still waters and in righteous paths. But we must follow Him! How often we, like that lamb in Scotland, like the lamb in Jesus' parable, leave the flock and go off on our own because we know more than the Shepherd and then we get lost and stranded and then devoured. Oh may we follow our Good Shepherd's voice!

Jesus said the Good Shepherd lays down His life for His sheep. Say lays down. Part of the shepherd's job was to protect his sheep from predators and thieves as Jesus says here. There were lions, bears, hyenas, and wolves in Israel at the time all of which enjoyed a meal delicious mutton. You'll remember David killed both a lion and a bear when they threatened his sheep. To protect his flock at night, the shepherd would build a sheepfold that Jesus mentions here. It was an enclosure of rocks or brush with an opening where the sheep went in and out. It sometimes had a gate, but most often there was not so the shepherd himself laid down across the opening at night to guard his keep. But if a lamb tried to wander out, it would step on him and wake him up and he'd shew it back in. If a wolf tried to come in, it had to get past the shepherd first. He laid down his life for the sheep.

What a perfect picture of the Good Shepherd or as Hebrews calls Him, the Great Shepherd of the sheep! Jesus gathers His sheep into His fold, that is His church, and then lays down His life for our protection against the one who prowls about like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. He protects us against ravenous wolves, even those draped in sheep's wool.

But you're ahead of me here. The ultimate fulfillment of Jesus' words occurred when He laid down His life on the cross to save every lost sheep. He not only risked His life, He gave it up so that we could be saved. We'll be talking more another Sunday about Jesus' role as our Savior, but let's understand today He laid down His life to protect us from sin and pain and ultimately from hell itself.

So since the Messiah would be a shepherd, the Father saw fit to reveal Him first to shepherds as they watched their flocks by night. This was no coincidence. God does nothing willy nilly. He doesn't wing anything. And so as those dirty, smelly, sleepy shepherds worked that night away from family and friends, while they had been perhaps turned out of parties and homes, a multitude of heavenly hosts came to tell them of the Good Shepherd born that night in the city of David, the shepherd king. And they came and they saw and they worshipped and then they went and told. What a special part of the Christmas story is Jesus' birth announcement not to kings and queens, not to diplomats and emperors, not to wealthy tycoons or victorious generals, but to lowly shepherds who knew first hand the frustrations this Good Shepherd would face and the joys He would appreciate and who knew best the work He came to do.

Remember that sheep stranded on the cliff? It somehow survived there for two years before 3 people repelled 820 feet down to her. Somehow, they were able to attach a sling and use a winch to lift her back up where she rejoined the flock and enjoyed the care of her shepherd again. My friends, that's a perfect picture of what Jesus came and did. He repelled down not just 8 stories, but the infinite distance between heaven and earth to save all of us rebellious sheep stranded on our hopeless cliffs. We had no option except eternal hell. We could never work our way back up the cliff of our sins and not the deep blue sea, but the fires of hell were brewing below us. And on that first Christmas, Jesus dropped over the edge of eternity's cliff to rescue us. He came to seek and to save His sheep which were lost. Each of us is the one that Jesus left the 99 others to come and find and rescue.

And when He does, He takes us in His arms and He rejoices. In Isaiah 40, we're told "11 He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young." What a tender precious picture of the Good Shepherd who loves His sheep. Jesus came at Christmas to be our Good Shepherd and we celebrate that this first Sunday in our advent season.

We are blessed to have several gifted artists at Antioch who agreed to use their talents to paint various images of Jesus and we'll be unveiling these pictures throughout our Advent messages and they will be hung in the fellowship hall pointing all to Jesus. And this morning, we start with the Good Shepherd painted by sister Kay Witt. Not to glorify her but to glorify her Good Shepherd and ours. (unroll it, slide). It's no compliment to be called a sheep. We may resist being identified as something so stupid but the title is certainly appropriate. And Pastor Geordany from Haiti said, "If you're not a sheep, Jesus can't be your shepherd." If you've never become one of the Good Shepherd's sheep, come into His fold today. Allow Him to find you, rescue you, and carry you close to His heart as we pray.

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