

“Jesus the Good Shepherd”

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Opening Prayer

Good Morning, lots of prayer and well wishes to you and yours. Hopefully everything in this strange time is going good for you, God willing we will be able to meet together in person once again very soon. A quick reminder that your church is here for you in any way that you need, we care! We are continuing our Lenten theme this morning by looking at another of Jesus’s great teachings out of the Gospel of John. We have been alternating between the teachings of Jesus on Sunday mornings and the miracles of Jesus on Wednesday evenings. In the Gospel of John both Jesus’s miracles and His teachings give us clues into who He is. We have already talked at length about how Jesus is fully God and fully man, about how He is in control, and about how He has power. Today we talk about what is a very appropriately timed theme, that Jesus is the Good Shepherd.

For context we should all know that for the majority of human history most people were agrarian based. That means that most people worked in agriculture. The Jews were no exception, and in fact they were a primarily nomadic herding people. Long story short, the Jews were based around raising sheep. (Fun fact, sheep is the most consumed meat worldwide.) These people knew what a good shepherd looked like. A good shepherd was one who actually cared for the sheep. Jesus uses this as a metaphor for how He looks after us, after His people. Jesus’s counter-comparison to the good shepherd is a simple hired hand, someone who cares little for the sheep and is just maintaining them for a paycheck. Just like your pets at home, the pets know who really cares for them and who doesn’t. Jesus’s whole point here is that He cares for His people, and that His “sheep” know Him and follow His voice because He does in fact care.

In John 10:4 Jesus shares with us this metaphor of the good shepherd. John 10:4 reads “When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.” Beloved, we know Jesus’s voice if we are His. We follow Him, we don’t follow others, and a Christian who is actively doing their best to follow Jesus is going to know His voice. Back home in Fall Creek Wisconsin I grew up next to an old-timer named Vaughn. Vaughn is as stereotypical of a Wisconsin farmer as you can imagine, and he is an all around great guy. One of the things that was fascinating about him is how he would work with his cows. When it was time for them to switch to a different pasture, to move to another field to graze, Vaughn would hop on his old fourwheeler and call out “C’mon cows!” Just like the piper those cows would stop what they were doing, and they would follow him joyfully into the next pasture. They knew his voice, they knew that he had something good in store for

them in the next field, and they trusted him. Jesus is making that connection with us and Himself in this scripture, letting us know that He is the good shepherd, that we are to follow Him because we know His voice and we know that He will lead us towards something that is good for us. But a good shepherd Jesus claims does more than just tend the sheep when it is easy, the good shepherd earns the trust of the sheep in a much more important way. The reason why the sheep follow the good shepherd is clear in verse eleven, which reads "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep."

Ask yourself the question, who are you the most comfortable around and why? If the crap really hits the fan in your life, who is it that you turn to for safety? Your spouse? Your parents? Your kids if you are a bit older? Your best friends? Who do you turn to, and why do you turn to them? The answer is pretty easy, the reason we turn to those people is because we know that they have our best interests at heart. We trust that they aren't there to hurt us, we trust that they won't leave us behind on our own in our worst trials, and we know that they truly care. Those people we trust the most have earned it most likely by their actions. Beloved Congregation, there is one more person who deserves your trust and who has more than earned it: Jesus. He says in verse fifteen "As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep." There is a peace that should come with knowing that the Lord who rules everything loves us enough to die for us. He certainly deserves our trust and has earned it. This talk about trusting in Jesus that you hear from the church and from other Christians isn't less important in times like we are experiencing now, in fact it is more important. Like we talked about last week we do not need to be afraid, our Lord who loves us enough to die for us is in control and He is willing to go so far as to die upon the cross for our sins in our place. Perhaps just maybe we can trust Him in times of great trial like we are experiencing right now. With the knowledge that your Creator is in charge of all, the knowledge that He loves us, and the knowledge that He protects us, perhaps we can rest a little easier at night. Just look at what Jesus shares with us in verses 27-28: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand." That sure is comforting to know! However there is more to glean out of this section of scripture. This image of the shepherd has another side to it too that we should watch for, and that is the contrast between Jesus the Good Shepherd and the hired man.

Jesus makes the comparison in verse 12-14 that He is not like the hireling. He uses an example that would probably make sense to us today. The hired hand, when things are going good, seems to be adequate. He feeds the sheep and tends them, but when the hour is dire then the hireling flees and the sheep are left alone. Why? Because the hireling doesn't really care about the sheep, he just cares about getting his wages. The point Jesus is trying to make is that He is not going to abandon His people like a hired hand would abandon someone else's. What does this mean for us, what was He communicating to the people and the Pharisees in His time? He

was implying that you don't trust the hired hand. You don't trust something that isn't God breathed.

Note that when Jesus is speaking all of this about being a good shepherd and taking care of His flock, that the Jewish leaders are right there. While there were a couple good ones, the majority of those Jewish leaders hated Jesus. They thought He was a blasphemer, they thought He was doing His works by the devil, and they were afraid that the people were going to leave them and follow Him. Notice in verse 30 when Jesus says "I and the Father are one," that the Jewish leaders' response is to pick up stones to kill Him. These same Jewish leaders who claim piety and yet wish to stone Jesus (for which they had no claims) are akin to the hireling in many respects. Jesus constantly admonishes them for not really caring about the Lord or His people, but rather caring about their own pockets and reputation. (More on that as we get into the crucifixion.) Just as the sheep shouldn't trust in a hireling to protect them, so too shouldn't the Lord's followers put their trust into something less than the Lord. To bring this into our modern context, while the rest of the world goes nuts over the coronavirus, we should be placing our hope in the Lord knowing that we are protected by Him. He doesn't promise us that our life will always be easy or that we will escape unscathed, but He does promise to walk with us through all of it and to take care of us. Practically speaking, what you should recognize from Jesus's teachings on being the good shepherd this morning is that He is watching over us so we do not need to be afraid.

Beloved Congregation, life is hard and scary at times. I have heard many of you express anxiety and fear surrounding what is happening in our world. It is ok to be cautious, and it is ok to take the situation we find ourselves in as a globe seriously. However, we can have peace knowing that Jesus, our good shepherd, watches over us. We are promised eternal life if we stick with Him. He promises that no one and no thing will snatch us out of His hand. He proved for us two thousand years ago that His words here are trustworthy by dying upon the cross for our sins in our place. We can truthfully rest easy knowing that Jesus is in control, that He has power, that He is fully God and fully man, and that He is our good shepherd. To close out our message today I would like read for you Psalm 23. Hear these words and know that the Lord has it all under His care. **Read Psalm 23.** Let us pray.

Closing Prayer