

Easter 3 - John 10:11-16

Rev. Jeff Hendrix | Faith Lutheran Church

John 10:11-16

¹¹“I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²The hired man, who is not a shepherd, does not own the sheep. He sees the wolf coming, leaves the sheep, and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the sheep and scatters them. ¹³Because he works for money, he does not care about 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. ¹⁶I also have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. Then there will be one flock and one shepherd.”

The Good Shepherd

The words of Scripture are beautiful. The picture of the Good Shepherd is perhaps among the most beautiful images ever recorded. The depiction of the Good Shepherd from the 23rd Psalm, “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters,” is probably the most well-known and most-quoted verse in the Bible, even more so than John 3:16.

But why is the picture of the Good Shepherd beautiful? I think sometimes we picture Jesus as a nice, lovable guy, who loves to hang out and pet sheep, and frolic with them in the fields while the sun is setting over the green grass. It’s the quintessential “pastoral” scene. But sometimes, the perceived outward, sentimental beauty of this can actually get in the way, of what God has to teach us through the Words of Scripture.

So I’d like to suggest when you picture the Good Shepherd, you think of a different scene. An even more beautiful one, an objectively beautiful one, the scene that makes the picture of the Good Shepherd *truly* beautiful, truly Good. A real Pastoral scene. The first detail of that scene is found in the first verse of our lesson:

“I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” The scene is this: the Shepherd dies. The Shepherd is attacked by what had wanted to devour the sheep. The Shepherd is bloodied, marred, and killed.

Now, I know what you’re thinking: “Pastor, that’s not a beautiful scene, that’s the opposite of a beautiful scene. And what’s more that’s not a *good* shepherd, a *good* shepherd doesn’t die. This is a terrible shepherd. A *good* shepherd is at least smart enough to defend his sheep and not die. Sheep would never get into something so dangerous that their shepherd would chose to die on their behalf.” Oh, you overestimate the sheep. In order to save the sheep from death, the Shepherd had to die.

If the sheep had been good and listened to their shepherd, this scene wouldn’t have happened. See, the idyllic pastoral scene *had* existed before this. When God created mankind, He became the Shepherd of all mankind. They became His sheep. He provided them with the green pastures and gentile waters in a place called the Garden of Eden. It was paradise. God actually walked with them and talked with them. God’s flock was to rest securely. But soon, the wolf came. The devil, seeking to devour the sheep, tempted man in the garden and man gave

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in. Man strayed from the Shepherd's protection. That straying, that sin, has been passed down to each generation. To us.

We are sheep. God has given us the promise of green pastures through the Word and the promise of gentile waters in Baptism, and yet, we stray too.

We stray from God's fold. We misuse God's name, we despise God's Word, we don't honor our authorities, we hate, we steal, we give others a bad name, we covet. So many things that "deceive us and lead us into misbelief, despair and other shameful sin and vice." And so many times have we given in and wandered towards eternal danger.

But here's a second detail of this beautiful scene, of what makes the Shepherd 'Good'. He says, "I am the Good Shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me."

There was a Palestinian shepherd that once was said knew all his sheep by name. One day an American tourist came to check it out, and the shepherd was willing to oblige him. Pointing to one sheep amid the entire flock, the shepherd called a name and sure enough, that sheep raised its head and made its way through the flock to the shepherd's side. Pointing to another sheep and calling another name, he drew a second sheep to his side. He repeated this until all the sheep had left the watering hole and joined the shepherd.

"How can you tell them apart," the tourist asked, "When they look so much alike?" "Well," replied the shepherd, "I know this one by his deformed ear, and this one by the tuft of wool torn from his back, and this one by his infected eyes." And so on, the shepherd continued. The shepherd knew his sheep by their defects. Likewise, the Good Shepherd knows us by our defects.

He knows one sheep for his weakness in failing to put God first. He knows another for her endless worrying, another for their feeling of helplessness, another for their flaring temper, and another for their deep feelings of regret, and others for their doubts and fears.

Now, again, I know what you're thinking, "Pastor, this isn't a Good Shepherd. I don't want my Shepherd to know all my faults. That's not good."

But there's something different about this Good Shepherd. He doesn't use our sins against us. He doesn't blackmail us with our various faults and make us do things to make up for what we've done against Him and against others. No, He knows our sins, our failures, our weaknesses, He knows them intimately: He took them on Himself and He died with them. He took our sin, and in return, gave us His perfection. And now, He knows us as His own, as His redeemed sheep. And He also knows what each of us still need.

He knows one sheep who struggles with responsibilities. The one who doesn't think about anything except the here and now, the one who lets anything and everything come first before hearing the Shepherd's Word. The Good Shepherd doesn't put anything else before them. They are His first priority. He gives them everything they need.

He knows the sheep who is despised by the rest of the sheep. The one pushed to the outside of the flock because they're different, they're poor, they're helpless, they're sick; they're young;

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they're old; they're insignificant. The Good Shepherd doesn't overlook them. He loves them, takes care of them as more valuable than Himself, and pursues them with love and concern. He brings them to Himself.

He knows the sheep who is frightened. The one who is keenly aware of their danger and lack of strength. The one who is lonely, the one who is insignificant in *their own* eyes, He comforts them. "Why are you so timid," He says, "I am your Shepherd, I fight for you."

He knows the sheep who are weak, He comes to them with His power. The sheep who are ignorant, He speaks simply with them. The sheep who have a need, that no one else knows or could imagine, He knows them. The sheep who hungers for acceptance, friendship, and love, He blesses and comforts with His love.

This is the beauty of the Good Shepherd. "I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep...I am the Good Shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me."

Jesus is the Good Shepherd of sinners. He's not the Shepherd of people who are good all the time. He's the Shepherd of sinners who aren't. He's our Shepherd. And He doesn't make us pay for our sins. He doesn't make us make up the time we lost for our irresponsibility. He doesn't make us do anything for all of our straying. He paid for it with His own life.

The Good Shepherd is Good because the sheep are not, and He laid down His life for them. He's a Shepherd who is Good because He knows His sheep. He doesn't just hang out and pet the sheep, He takes on their sins and weaknesses, and He dies with them and for them, and then rises. With the same hands that were marked with the nails, He now carries His sheep. He knows what they need.

Jesus is pastoral. He is the true Pastor. The word "pastor" by the way, simply means "shepherd." *Good* Pastors know their sheep and lay down their life for the sheep. Now, again, I know what you're thinking: "Pastor, are you a good shepherd?" No, I am not, I'm not a Good Shepherd. In fact, I have more in common with a hireling than the Good Shepherd. I fail as a shepherd, as a pastor, too. I also am a sheep. I too, need a Shepherd, a Good Shepherd who will lay down His life for me. One who knows my failings, but also knows what I need, and will provide for my needs.

And yet Jesus has hired me to shepherd for Him. He's given me the means to do so, the means which bring what I need and the means which bring what you need.

Through the Words of Scripture, He brings others into His fold; He brings you into His fold. And through Scripture, you know Him. You know your Good Shepherd, because you hear Him. You know your Good Shepherd, because He's joined you to Himself in Baptism. You know your Good Shepherd, because He's died for you, and given you His body and blood as your guarantee in the Lord's Supper. You know your Good Shepherd because He rose from the dead, which proves that you have eternal life too, that you will join Him in the green pastures of heaven. That "though you are tempted [and stray, because of your Shepherd who died for you and knows you, you will] still in the end overcome and retain the victory."

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Your Good Shepherd has died, but He has also risen. He is risen indeed. Amen.