

## **Theme: How Good is Our “Good Shepherd!”**

### **Text: John 10:11-18**

**"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> "But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. <sup>13</sup> "The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. <sup>14</sup> "I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. <sup>15</sup> "As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> "And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd. <sup>17</sup> "Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. <sup>18</sup> "No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father."**

In the study of languages it doesn't take you long to realize that words in other languages have different "flavors" or shades of meaning than the English words we use to describe them. The same can be true if you were to try and translate certain words, especially slang terms, from English to another language. It would be hard, for example, to define in another language just exactly what the word "cool" means in all its English contexts and uses. You'd probably have to use a number of different words to describe what "cool" means, and you probably still wouldn't be able to fully describe all its subtleties and nuances. The true "flavor" of the word would probably be "lost in translation," as the expression goes. And yet, those of us who speak English as our native language instantly get the sense of what someone means when they say, "That car was *cool!*"

Well, we have a similar example of this phenomenon in our text for today when we hear Jesus say, "**I am the good shepherd**" (v. 11). Now, this expression of Jesus' has become near and dear to the hearts of countless Christians throughout the centuries even though the English word "**good**" that is used here to translate the original Greek word falls far short of describing the "flavor" and sense of it. Think about it: Jesus is the "**good shepherd.**" That's it? He's just "**good**"? Doesn't that sound like a massive understatement?

Well, the original Greek word used here is *kalos* (καλός). This word is very full of meaning and Jesus probably could not have used a better word to describe Himself. *Kalos* is defined by one Greek dictionary as meaning "good, beautiful, lovely...as a quality of freedom from defects excellent...of a sound moral disposition good, noble, praiseworthy" (Friberg Greek Dictionary, Bible Works 4.0). With all this depth of meaning how has Jesus' expression, "**I am the good shepherd**" (v. 11) come to be such a beloved expression by so many Christians, many of whom have had no idea what the original Greek word used in that phrase fully means?

Well, although many of the nuances of this word *kalos* are "lost in translation" from the original Greek to English God has not allowed us to misunderstand or miss out on all that Jesus means when He says to us, "**I am the good shepherd**" (v. 11). He has given us perhaps the greatest "definition" and description of Jesus, our "**Good Shepherd**" in the words of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm which we read in our Old Testament reading for this morning. When we take this beautiful description and combine it with the words Jesus uses to describe Himself in our text (and in the verses leading up to this text, which we read in our Gospel reading for today: **John 10:1-10**) we won't be left wondering "How good is our 'Good Shepherd?'" We'll be exclaiming "**How Good is Our 'Good Shepherd!'**"

Jesus says in v. 14 of our text, "**I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own**" (v. 14). Again, here the word for "**know**" in the original Greek has a much fuller meaning. It means to *know personally, to understand, even to know intimately*. It is a *knowledge of experience*, not simply a

knowledge of mere acquaintance or recognition. In English we might say, “I *know* who Steph Curry is,” (or some other famous person), but I don’t know him *personally*.

The expression Jesus uses here indicates that He “**knows**” us *personally* and *understands* us perfectly. Jesus “**knows**” us better than we know ourselves! That really is an incredible thought when you think about it, but that’s part of what makes Jesus not just a “good shepherd,” but rather the “**Good Shepherd!**” He has millions, even billions of “sheep” in His sheepfold and yet a few verses earlier we read in our Gospel reading in this same chapter of John that Jesus says of each one of his “sheep,” His believers, that “**He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out**” (John 10:3). This only makes sense since Jesus is the all-knowing God who created and redeemed the entire world, but it is none-the-less remarkable and mind-blowing that this same almighty, all-knowing God takes a personal interest in me and you! He wants nothing more than to have a close personal relationship with each one of us!

It’s obvious, then, that this “**knowledge**” that Jesus, our “**Good Shepherd**” has of His sheep is a *loving, caring* knowledge, much like a good shepherd has to have for his sheep. You see, sheep are some of the most difficult animals to love. They are for the most part helpless and very weak; they are remarkably stupid and self-destructive animals who have a tendency to follow the rest of the herd even if it means danger or death. And yet, a good shepherd loves his sheep, knows each one of them by name, and cares for them—not because they are so likable by nature—but because of who he is, and because he knows they depend on his help.

In the same way, Jesus, our “**Good Shepherd**” does not love us and care for us because of the remarkably good qualities in us. We are compared to sheep in Scripture because we too are helpless and weak; we can be remarkably stupid and by nature self-destructive and apt to follow the crowd even if it means danger or death to our bodies and souls. And yet, Jesus loves and cares for us because of who He is; despite our “unlovable” qualities and our helplessness. He knows we need His help and in His goodness, He loves and cares for us.

In turn Jesus says in our text, “[I] **am known by My own**” (v. 14). Now it makes sense that Jesus “**knows**” us *personally*, after all He made us, but how in the world is this same word used for “**know**” used of our *personal, relational* knowledge of Jesus? How on earth can we “**know**” *personally* the God and Savior of the universe? Jesus made it very clear a few verses after our sermon text when He said, “**My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me**” (John 10:27). We get to know Jesus *personally* and *closely* by “**hearing His voice**,” that is, by reading, hearing, and studying His Word. Here, in the Bible Jesus has revealed Himself to us very clearly as the “**Good Shepherd**”—our friend, provider, and Savior. Jesus even predicted in our text that we, specifically, would hear His call, “**And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd**” (v. 16). These “**other sheep**” Jesus was speaking of were the *Gentiles*, the non-Jewish people, who would also be brought to faith in Christ through the preaching of His Gospel. We are included in that group and now we “**know Him**” and “**follow Him**.” Our “**knowledge**” of Jesus, then, is also a *loving* knowledge, much like sheep have for their caring shepherd. “**We love Him because He first loved us**” (1 John 4:19) John reminds us.

Jesus reminds us in our text of why we *truly* love Him, and why He *truly* is our “**Good Shepherd!**” Jesus says in the first verse of our text, “**I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep**” (v. 11). There is no greater love than that! A love that is so self-less and so self-sacrificing that He would give His own life up for His sheep. Jesus Himself even said, “**Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends**” (John 15:13). That is how we know Jesus, our “**Good Shepherd**,” truly loves us: He gave up His life for us! Notice in our text He predicts 4 times that He’s going to “**lay down His life for the sheep**” (v. 11, 15, 17, 18). Not only that, but Jesus makes it very clear that this sacrifice would be a willing one made by His own choice and would be in accordance with His Father’s will, “**No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself...This command I have received from My Father**” (v. 18).

Jesus contrasts His self-sacrificing love with that of a **“hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep” (v. 12-13)**. In contrast, we might call these **“hirelings”** “bad shepherds.” Who are these “bad shepherds” that Jesus is speaking of? Well, do you know what the word **pastor** means? It means “shepherd.” Pastors then, are the undershepherds of Christ, the **“Good Shepherd.”** Some of these “undershepherds” are not **“good.”** They do not care about the sheep; they do not treat them as “their own” even though they are the sheep that the **“Good Shepherd”** has called them to be responsible for. These **“hirelings”** are only there for their paycheck, for their own convenience, or to make a name for themselves, or to make a comfortable living. When danger or hard times come he flees from the sheep and the sheep are scattered or even destroyed. The scary thing for the sheep is that there is a little (and sometimes more than a little) **“hireling”** in every “undershepherd,” every **pastor**—yes, even in your pastor!—because pastors also have a sinful, selfish human flesh. That is why above all none of us should put our full trust in the “undershepherds”—even if they are a really “good” one—but rather put our full trust and confidence in the **“Shepherd and Overseer of your souls,” (1 Peter 2:25)**, Jesus Christ Himself. If the **“hireling,”** the “undershepherd,” that Christ has placed over you isn’t speaking **“the voice”** of the **“Good Shepherd,”** that is the Word of God itself—no matter who he is—do not listen; do not follow! Listen and follow first and foremost your **“Good Shepherd!”**

Look at it this way: Who would you trust more to protect your life and even sacrifice himself for you in the face of danger: a mall security guard, or a dedicated Marine who is a veteran of war? That security guard may be very good at his job, he may even be a very nice man, but I’m going to put my trust and confidence, not in the **“hireling,”** but in the man whose sworn duty it is to protect me and my country.

Christ not only solemnly promised to **“lay down His life for the sheep” (v. 11)**, He delivered and did just that on Golgatha’s cross on Good Friday. However, a dead shepherd really does the sheep no good. Yes, it is a valiant, loving gesture on His part and shows the ultimate in sacrificial love. However, if the shepherd is dead the wolves can then just swoop in and destroy and scatter the unprotected sheep. That is why Jesus did not stay our “dead Shepherd.” He says in our text, **“I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again” (v. 17-18)**. Jesus’ resurrection from the dead on the third day proves that being our **“Good Shepherd”** includes Jesus being our all-powerful **“Victorious Shepherd!”** His resurrection guarantees our own resurrection on the Last Day and it assures us that we will be able to say with David in the **23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm**, **“And I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever” (Psalm 23:6)**.

Jesus our **“Good Shepherd”** loves us and knows us despite our “unlovable” characteristics: our helplessness, our weakness, and our disobedience. On the other hand we love and know Him because of His great love and the great blessings He has given us:

- ✠ He calls us, His sheep, by our own name;
- ✠ He leads us out; He goes before us;
- ✠ He provides for us with the **“green pastures”** and **“still waters” (Psalm 23:2)** of His Word and Sacraments;
- ✠ He defends us against all our enemies;
- ✠ and above all He laid down His life for us, His sheep, and powerfully took it back up again in victory!

Sheep that understand all that their **“Good Shepherd”** has done for them cannot help but love and **“know”** this Shepherd. That love and knowledge of the sheep for the Shepherd is gained by hearing the “voice of the Shepherd” in His Word. Listen to Him. Listen to Him and thank Him for being our *beautiful, excellent, noble, praiseworthy*—**“Good”** Shepherd! Amen.