

The Fourth Sunday of Easter

April 17, 2016

**Prayer of the Day:** O Lord Jesus Christ, you are the Good Shepherd who laid down your life for the sheep. Lead us now to the still waters of your life-giving Word that we may abide in your Father's house forevermore; for you live and reign with him and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Verse of the Day:** Alleluia! Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! I am the Good Shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me. Alleluia! (John 10:14)

**Sermon Text:** John 10:22-30

He stood there, toes hanging over the edge of the concrete, rubber ring snug around his waist, goggles strapped on top of his head, eyes staring at the sparkling blue water. His father stands waist-deep in the pool. A gentle voice promises to catch him. His outstretched arms signal him to follow his call. The father already in those feared waters stands to make sure those waters do not wash over his son's head.

Many of us can picture a child taking his first plunge into a pool. In fact, maybe you were that child with toes hanging over the edge, floaties strapped to your arms and waist, eyes terrified at the sight of jumping. You wanted to make sure that your father would not drop you or let you get water in your eyes or let you or drown to death. Could you instantly jump in? Maybe you were the parent, coaxing your child to trust you. You knew your child would be safe; you already were in the water. Now, you try to explain that you understand your child's fears and that you stand with more power than those fears. Could you get your child to jump right away?

Sometimes life gives you the opportunity to stand on both sides of trust. Either you are the one asked to trust or the one asking to be trusted. Does that shed a new light on Jesus guiding you as your Good Shepherd? Can his Word really calm your fears? Can his voice really lead you away from deadly dangers? Is it even worth following your Good Shepherd whole-heartedly?

Today Jesus gives you reason after reason for you to trust him. **FOLLOW THE SHEPHERD WHO IS GOOD!** *He speaks to you. He leads you. He saves you.*

**John 10:22-30**

<sup>22</sup> Then came the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, <sup>23</sup> and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon's Colonnade. <sup>24</sup> The Jews gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."

<sup>25</sup> Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, <sup>26</sup> but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. <sup>27</sup> My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup> My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. <sup>30</sup> I and the Father are one."

That is why Jesus *speaks to you*. He gives the reason why he can even be called the Good Shepherd. Yet, you do not hear Jesus call himself “Good Shepherd” in our selected verses. In the verses right before our reading Jesus does say: *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep* ([John 10:11](#)). When he first said that, his Jewish audience was confused. Some thought Jesus was a crazy, demon-possessed lunatic. Others wondered if he truly could be the Son of God ([10:19-21](#)).

So, when we get to our verses, two months have passed since Jesus said he is the Good Shepherd. **Then came the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon’s Colonnade. The Jews, gathered around him, saying, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.”** It seems like an innocent demand. *“Tell us, Jesus. Can we trust you or not? Are you really able to help us in life or should we be looking for another object of trust?”*

Yet, Jesus has already answered those questions! After he is baptized, Jesus plainly says: “I am the Christ” ([John 4:26-30](#)). Later, he tells these same religious leaders that he lived long before their ancestor Abraham, because he is the eternal Son of God ([John 8:58](#)). Never once does Jesus base this claim on his own feelings. He calls himself the “Christ” because he is the “Christ.” That title “Christ” tells you that God prophesied how and where his Son would be born, how he would preach, and how perfect his life would be. Now Jesus is saying that these prophecies describe his life— and that his life keeps those promises.

As if speaking is not enough **The miracles [Jesus does] in [his] Father’s name speak for [him]**. Giving sight to the blind or opening deaf ears or making bread and fish feed thousands of people are not magic tricks. Rather, each miracle, every supernatural act is reminder of the power you and I do not have. We cannot give the word to multiply food or touch ears and grant instant healing— but Jesus can.

Jesus really cannot make it any clearer. He is the Son of God. You know he is the Son of God because God has given you his Word— literally. Jesus chooses to speak to you through the Bible. So, that means when you hear the Bible read, you are hearing God’s thoughts. It is as though God stands in front of you and speaks to you directly.

You know, sometimes fear grips a little child that he does not jump into the pool right away. He stands there frozen stiff, and so the parent speaks in order to give that child a reason to trust. In the same way, Jesus *speaks to you* so that you know exactly who he is. You can trust his power to guide and protect you because he truly has power to guide and protect you. You can trust that his Word is true because the Word of God already calls him God! All this makes you confident to **FOLLOW THE SHEPHERD WHO IS GOOD!**

Jesus *speaks to you* so that *he leads you*. Is that not the point of having God’s Word in your hands? To *lead you* throughout life— and everything else that happens in life? In the pages of Scripture you hear the voice of Jesus steering you from danger. His Words lead your life to comforting peace. Jesus can look into the future in order to guard you from coming danger.

Yet, many other voices call out around you, do they not? You hear politicians and corporations attempt to redefine genders and then speak how you are to accept their

definitions. You read internet blogs which pick and choose which parts of the Bible can be followed and which teachings are “outdated” or “old-fashioned” or “bigoted.” You hear your own friends (or family) tell how you are to treat those who hurt you. All these voices beg you to follow them, to shape your life around someone else’s words!

These voices may give the wrong definitions of morality. Yet, how tempting for you to trust and follow what they are saying!

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, already leads you with his Words from Scripture. He shapes your decisions by his Word and anchors your mind to his standards of “right” and “wrong” by the same Word. Yet, do our hearts ever label his words as “intolerant” or “unfair” or “old-fashioned”— and so we own some right to reject them? If so, then what are we saying about Jesus, the Good Shepherd? That he fails us, hurts us, harms us, really does not know how to lead us in life? That there are times when his words lead us off towards a cliff or into painful thorns or into the wolf’s mouth? That the Shepherd is not really “good?”

How often is it not the other way around!? That so often we are the ones who have walked away from his Word and wandered into pain, suffering, and sin’s consequences? Jesus says, **“My sheep listen to my voice.”** How often our own thoughts, words, and actions have marked us as anything but a sheep listening to our Shepherd-God!

That little phrase sounds ironic— because there have been many times I have not listened to the voice of my Shepherd, and yet he still calls me “his sheep.” He says even more than that: **“I know them.”** That means Jesus knows more than that you just exist and more than just knowing you are a Christian. He knows your actions, your thoughts, and your very heart. Because he knows the sinful choices that so often entangle us, he tends to those needs.

The Good Shepherd bandages a lack of trust by pointing you to the cross. There he died for you— and he died to bring you into his flock. He rose again so that he can stand as your Shepherd who holds more power than anything else in this world! He enters heaven so that he can watch over you and guide you safely to his side.

So, he continues speaking to you through the Word. You might hear many other voices in the world. You might be told to define “right” and “fair” and “just” by what the world has determined. Yet, the Good Shepherd continues speaking his unchanging Word. Sometimes his Word will stand out from every other voice you hear in the world. Sometimes you might feel pressure because of that. Remember, the Word is the only way you are going to heaven. In that Word, you see your Good Shepherd win life for you. So, **FOLLOW THE SHEPHERD WHO IS GOOD.** *He speaks to you so that he leads you because he saves you.*

That is the point of Jesus walking as your Good Shepherd. He comes to save you. Look at the verbs in John 10:27-28. They are all present tense and describe actions which continue. As you continue listening (today, tomorrow, the day after, etc.), you continue following Jesus. As you continue following (today, tomorrow, the day after, etc.), you continue holding eternal life.

That is why he speaks to you, to lead you to the reality of heaven as Revelations pictures it. Revelation pulls back the curtain to give you a peek of what your life with Jesus will be like. Your Shepherd leads you to the throne of God so that you can be there and shouting praises to the Lamb ([7:9-10](#)). The Shepherd leads you to a world so different from the tears, sorrows, sadness, disappointments, heartaches so often found in ours! ([7:15-17](#)).

Yet, the Good Shepherd does not just point your eyes off to the distant future. He reveals the comfort of life you have right now: **“I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish.”** Trusting in the saving work of Jesus during life on earth means you will never die. Yes, you might close your eyes one last time, but you will open them immediately to see the face of Jesus.

So, you **FOLLOW THE SHEPHERD WHO IS GOOD**. *He saves you.* Again, the verb is present. Your living faith means that you stand on the narrow road to heaven.

As you continue walking down that narrow road, your Good Shepherd walks right beside you. **No one can snatch [you] out of my hand. My Father, who has given [you] to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch [you] out of my Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.”**

Yes, you and I will continue walking through the valley of the shadow of death. You may be anxious about the future— what laws might be passed against you, what political leader might govern the nation, what the future of your beloved congregation might look like. You might feel pressured to compromise on your beliefs. You might feel pulled to embrace the world’s definitions of order and morality. Yet, remember your Shepherd who saves you. Your Good Shepherd died and rose again in order to give you eternal life. If he paid that great price, will he then fail to bring you to heaven? Will he let the forces of Satan defeat you so that you can no longer hear the Word and be driven into unbelief? Will he take away his Word so that you will be confused in life? By no means! The Good Shepherd remains with you, shepherding and guiding you towards the eternal pastures of heaven.

Sometimes life gives you the opportunity to stand on both sides of trust. Either you are the child asked to trust the parent already in the water. You may be the one assuring the child to jump. Sometimes life frightens you; sometimes you know life is secure.

The Good Shepherd lives with power over all things. He already walked through the valley of the shadow of death and has arrived in heaven. Now, he walks beside you to follow in his path, to hear his Word, to lead you safely to that same heavenly kingdom.

His Word can really calm your fears. His voice can really lead you away from deadly dangers. Heaven is worth following your Good Shepherd whole-heartedly. Jesus gives you reason after reason for you to do so. **FOLLOW THE SHEPHERD WHO IS GOOD!** *He speaks to you. He leads you. He saves you.*