

DEVOTIONAL 8



CHRIST
CHURCH

JOHN 10:1-22

¹ “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. ² But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. ⁵ A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” ⁶ This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁷ So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.

⁸ All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. ¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and

leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³ He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

¹⁹ There was again a division among the Jews because of these words. ²⁰ Many of them said, “He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?” ²¹ Others said, “These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”

²² At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter,

DAY 1

JOHN 10:11-13

¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³ He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

Lent is naturally a time of reflection. In this season we reflect, in anticipation, on the work of Christ that has already happened (from our perspective) which can move us to think about many aspects of life today. Our daily rhythms, habits, our relationship with Jesus, our spouse, loved ones, friends, the state of our country, local politics, etc. As some of us set out to practice fasting from something during this time, a lot may be going through our minds. Jesus's statement that He is *the* Good Shepherd is chock-full of truths for us to consider. As *the* Good Shepherd, Jesus knows the sheep intimately and he dies for the flock. The scope of who is included is broad, and we find that Jesus has the authority to lay down his own life. Yet the aspect of this text that has struck me the most this week is the danger of being sheep.

In ancient days, shepherds would have to protect their flock from bears and lions (1 Sam 17:34). And they would have to lead the flock from the sheepfold in the village or town center out to a suitable area for grazing and resting. Our passage this morning mentions a wolf that comes and scatters the sheep and hired hands who come along and "lead" the sheep—until it gets tough. It's dangerous to be a sheep. Not to mention that sheep are easily distracted. Consider the parable of the lost sheep in Matthew 18:12-14 and Luke 15:3-7. If you are not familiar with this parable, the basic gist is that a sheep has wandered off, and the shepherd (Jesus) goes out to get that one sheep, even though there are still 99 other sheep back in the fold. In this parable, and elsewhere in the Bible, followers of Jesus are the sheep.

- "Prone to wander, Lord I feel it, Prone to leave the God I love" is a well-known line from the hymn "Come Thou Fount of Many Blessing". Where does your heart start to wander from God? What distractions—even good ones—have you encountered on your journey with Christ?
- James Montgomery Boice says that as sheep *"life will not necessarily be smooth, [even] under the direction of our Shepherd. He will sometimes lead us through rough places. Nevertheless, as we go through them we can know of his ability to keep us from falling and to present us before the presence of the Father with great joy."*

This week rest in the goodness of our Shepherd. For there are dangers that abound, and we will necessarily go through some rough patches. But the Good Shepherd will lead us to green pastures.

PRAYER

Pray through House of God Forever lyrics provided below. This song is such a comfort and reminder to me of the goodness of Jesus our Shepherd.

God is my shepherd
I won't be wanting, I won't be wanting
He makes me rest
In fields of green, with quiet streams
Even though I walk
Through the valley, of death and dying
I will not fear
'Cause You are with me, You are with me

Your shepherd's staff comforts me
You are my feast in the presence of enemies
Surely goodness will follow me, follow me
In the house of God forever

God is my shepherd
I won't be wanting, I won't be wanting
He makes me rest
In fields of green, by quiet streams
Even while I'm walking
Through the valley, of death and dying
I will not fear
'Cause You are with me, You're always with me

Your shepherd's staff comforts me
You are my feast in the presence of enemies
Surely goodness will follow me, follow me
In the house of God forever
In the house of God forever
In the house of God forever

Original song by Jon Foreman, cover by Page CXVI in link above

DAY 2

JOHN 10:11, 15b

¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep... ^{15b} and I lay down my life for the sheep.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He gave up his life that we might have life. He is the only good shepherd for us, his sheep. There is no one else who can fill this role. Jesus is the only shepherd and the only good shepherd. Jesus alone lived, died, and rose again for us.

The good shepherd understands the value of the sheep. The hired hand only sees his work as a means to an end. But the good shepherd knows each and every one of the sheep and cares for them. The good shepherd cares for the whole flock so much that he willingly lays down his life to save them from the ravages of the world and sin. He loves the sheep. Jesus loves us. This is how we know love—Christ laid down his life for us. This is the truth that we can abide in and take great comfort in. We have a good shepherd. We are not going through life unguided and uncared for. As his sheep, we have the anointing of the Holy Spirit to unite us to him, giving us an inheritance as children of God and strengthening us as we walk before him.

Jesus's example not only makes love known to us and gives us the gift of love, but it also sets an example of how we are to love those around us. As members of the fold, the body, we all have responsibilities to our brothers and sisters and as witnesses in the world. The way in which we live should reflect the way in which Jesus lived and died for us as our shepherd.

As we wait in expectation in the season of Lent, we can think upon the exemplary characteristics of a good shepherd. A good shepherd is faithful, hardworking, diligent, patient, self-sacrificing, and moved by love. As we think about these things, we should remember with joy how well Jesus fulfills and defines these characteristics, and we should also think about where we do well or fall short in these areas.

- Where should pride give way to humility?
- When should urgency be put aside for patience.
- How do we stop being driven by ambition or selfishness and be led by love?
- At what point does self-sacrifice become harmful?

The good shepherd stands in contrast to the hired hand who flees at the first sign of danger. Maybe the hired hand will go and alert someone else, but he will not risk his life for the good of someone else's flock. There are many forms that the hired hand may take today. Many leaders carry deeply held secrets that make them vulnerable to attack. Some do their best out of their own strength and forget the one who strengthens us for our work. And others fail to shepherd well out of ignorance or a simple lack of diligence. As you shepherd those you are responsible for, remember those who shepherd you in your prayers, that they may be led by love and wholeheartedly know and care for the flock. Ultimately, give thanks for the Good Shepherd without whom we all are lost.

PRAYER

O Lord, our shepherd, you have fulfilled our greatest need. You gave us the right to become children of the most high God. You are the bread of life, the living water. You have restored us to righteousness. As we seek to be conformed to your image, sustain us, strengthen us, give us guidance and discipline. Give wisdom and diligence to those who you have called to shepherd your flock. Help them to serve you as they seek to equip the body in its work. As we walk through the valleys and shadows in life, keep us from fear in the face of the enemy and embolden us to share your gospel. God, you have given us the Good Shepherd. Build in us faith in the true hope you have given us through him. In Jesus's name we pray, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

DAY 3

JOHN 10:14-15

¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,
¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. . . .

Jesus is continuing his discourse with the religious leaders after restoring sight to the blind man. Their disrespectful and insensitive treatment of a disabled person revealed what kind of shepherds they were. So Jesus used this opportunity to bear witness to who he is and why he has come. He named himself the Good Shepherd.

We often say a picture is worth a thousand words. When Jesus called himself the Good Shepherd, everyone listening could picture what they saw around them every day. They knew if a shepherd was good or bad by the condition of his flock. A good shepherd chose and purchased his sheep; his brand of ownership was on them. He knew and valued each one, often calling them by pet names—Cuddles, Stubborn Suzy, Nosy Nellie. And they knew his voice. Cultivating arid, rocky soil to produce grass, searching for clean water, protecting from pests and predators, seeking for lost or cast-down sheep, leading them down into dark and dangerous valleys on the way to cooler, higher summer pastures—these were the ways a shepherd put the needs of his flock before his own. False shepherds did not take such risks.

After explaining how he, as the Good Shepherd, gives himself for his sheep, Jesus speaks of the relationship he has with his flock: “I know my own, and my own know me.” He grounds his claim in the relationship he has with his Father. He is speaking of an intimate union, a oneness of essence, a total openness and transparency where acceptance and love do not have to be earned or proven by the good things you do or the bad things you don’t do. In this relationship, you are lovely because you are loved. The deep “knowing” comes out of the relationship as life is lived together. Here Jesus is touching our deepest human need—to know and be known.

When we see him as our Good Shepherd, never responding out of malice or deception, we are free to live an abundant life, free to fail and be forgiven, free to give ourselves as he has given, free to be at rest. Will you hear his voice today?

PRAYER

Loving Father, today we feel overwhelmed with what you have done in purchasing us and sending Jesus to find us in all our lost places. Being loved is such a wonderful way of being. Jesus, our Good Shepherd, we have heard your voice, and we submit to your rod and staff as well as your wonderful provision in so many ways. Thank you for your merciful patience. Thank you for putting us in a flock where we can know and be known, where we can belong and learn to know your voice. Thank you.

DAY 4

JOHN 10:16

And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

Cross-cultural missions involves a venture into the unfamiliar. Missionaries often feel the push and tug of cultural expectations that are foreign to them. The “common sense” ways of expressing emotion, relating to others in speaking and acting that they grew up with are shown to be not so “common” after all!

One missionary to Japan told a story of a time they were sharing the gospel with a Japanese friend. They quoted John 14:6 where Jesus says “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” In Japanese the word for truth is *shinri*. But if you leave out the N and say *shiri* instead, it means something totally different. *Shiri*, or *oshiri*, is a word that all boys and girls around the world can’t help but to giggle at. It means butt.

So the missionary was passionately sharing about Christ’s sacrifice of love on the cross and the redemption found only in him. With all the gusto of gospel conviction they look at their friend and say, “Jesus, he is the way, and the *shiri*, and the life.”

The Japanese friend let out a quick giggle, and immediately the missionary realized the mistake they had made. They went on to share a good hearty laugh together.

I heard this story during a gathering with other missionaries where we shared stories of embarrassing cultural blunders. We all laughed and laughed till we had no more happy tears to shed. Then we were reminded that as silly as we can be at times with the various mistakes we make, we can take great comfort in the fact that Jesus, though acutely aware of the challenges of living in the diverse cultural milieu of the world, he effortlessly relates to all people!

What was surprising to me about this passage today, is that Jesus already claims ownership of these sheep outside of the fold of Israel. He already has them. His voice is ready to call out to them, and indeed they will listen to him. Jesus doesn’t make the clumsy mistakes that we do, but even when his messengers mistake a *derriere* for truth, the Lord is savvy to redeem it all for His good purposes.

Jesus has invited all of us who are far off into his covenantal family. And he has many who are yet slumbering in sin and death, waiting to be awakened by the light and life of the gospel. So there will be one flock, one shepherd!

Take a moment this morning to remember the voice of Jesus that invited you into saving faith in him.

What particular promises of the gospel have led to your assurance of salvation in him?

If you are currently wrestling with your faith in Jesus, may this be an invitation for you to listen to Jesus's voice inviting you into his flock. He is your Good Shepherd, waiting to embrace you in his arms.

Consider someone in your life who is not walking with the Lord. How might Jesus be calling out to them? How might he use you to do that?

PRAYER

Father in heaven, we thank you and praise you that you are the God of all nations. As the Lord of all creation, you intimately know and celebrate the diversity of our world. Crossing culture is no challenge for you, for all of the earth is made by your hand. Today we are reminded that you have many sheep yet who are lost and far off. I too was one of them until your mercy found me. Send out your light and your truth. Let them lead me. Let them bring me, and the great multitude of your people from every nation, tribe and tongue, to your holy hill and to your dwelling. Lift my eyes to that day when we will gather around the altar of God, to exclaim our exceeding joy. We trust you, our tender shepherd, to sovereignly lead us till that day. Would your Spirit work through us to further that great mission, even this week. In Jesus's name, Amen.

DAY 5

JOHN 10:17-18

¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.

Today we meditate on the fact that Jesus was the one who chose to lay down his life. If Jesus hadn't laid down his life of his own accord, then who else could have made that happen?

Satan through Judas? In the passage below we see that Jesus was not a passive victim:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me. . .It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it.” So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, “What you are going to do, do quickly.” (John 13:21, 26-27)

The yelling mob? The law they were accusing Jesus of breaking was actually just a description of who he truly is:

When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, “Crucify him, crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him.” The Jews answered him, “We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God.” (John 19:6-7)

Pontus Pilate? See again the scripture:

So Pilate said to him...“Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?” Jesus answered him, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above.” (John 19:10-11a)

Did God the Father force Jesus to lay down his life? The first thing we can do in considering an answer to this question is to respectfully take Jesus at his word. In verse 18 of our scripture today he makes a point to say that he offered his life freely of his own accord. The New Testament echos that throughout:

...how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. (Hebrews 9:14)

...the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

Yet the mystery and beauty of Jesus choosing to lay down his own life is out of so much more than his love for us. He obviously does love us. (See Galatians 2:20 above and Mark 10:21 in reference to the rich young man “And Jesus, looking at him, loved him.”) But the eyes and heart of Jesus are always on his Father, and so it’s out Jesus’s love for his Father that he willingly and gladly saves us:

“...I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” (John 6:38-40)

Tim Keller has drawn from the sermon “Christ’s Agony” by Jonathan Edwards to powerfully show that Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane was given a foretaste of what he was being called to:

In the garden of Gethsemane Jesus began to experience God’s rejection.... As he sat down to begin to pray, he began to taste it...and he began to sweat blood out of his pores.... If the very anticipation and foretaste of this incredible pain and agony was so difficult, if just the foretaste of it was so difficult as to make the eternal Son of God sweat blood out of his pores, what must the actual experience of it have been like? We don’t know. But in the face of that, Jesus Christ looks up to the Father and says, “Father, I would like out of this. Father, I’m beginning to taste the cup. I’m in shock. I’m amazed at what this is going to be like. If there’s some way out of it, I want out of it.” But then he immediately says, “nevertheless.” That word, nevertheless, shows that there’s a premise that Jesus Christ is operating on. It’s something that was already a given: “Not my will but Thine be done.”

You see, when Jesus was sitting there in the garden of Gethsemane looking at the cup he was about to drink, do you know what he could have said? With absolute justice, he could have said, “Why should I leave all my glory and love in heaven to come to earth, and why should I take in this burning agony into my breast for these people who don’t appreciate what I’m doing, who don’t deserve what I’m doing, and who will never repay me for what I’m doing? I don’t owe them anything.” He had every right to say that but instead, he turned around and he said, “Father, for your sake and for their sake, if you want me to, I’ll take the cup.” (Keller, Tim, “Thy Will Be Done,” May 27, 1990)

God the Father didn’t force Jesus to lay down his life. While we would never presume to speak for God, it is almost as if the Father said to Jesus, “Let’s share our love with the children who have rejected us. Are you thinking what I’m thinking? Will you pay the price for that to happen?” And Jesus willingly said, “Yes.” During this season of Lent, we can rejoice as we remember the sacrifice of Christ. And we can work our way with anticipation to Easter, when we will celebrate the victory over death that he accomplished in his authority to take his *life back up again*. Hallelujah, what a Savior!

PRAYER

*Man of sorrows! What a name for the Son of God who came, ruined sinner to reclaim.
Hallelujah, what a Savior! Amen.*