

I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD
John 10.1-18

Tammy as a youngster enjoyed the church,
The people of the church, and the things of the church
But the thing that fascinated her most was the stain glass picture of Jesus
Surrounded by sheep and holding a little lamb with a thorn in his leg.
She always imagined herself as being held by Jesus.

She had moved away from the church and community.
But now she was back in town feeling worn and weathered;
Beaten, bruised, and abused by life's circumstances.

For some strange reason she was drawn towards the church,
and found herself sitting beneath the stain glass window of Jesus.

Tears of sorrow mixed with tears of relief as her restless heart again found peace.
She recognized and remembered something she had forgotten long ago,
That she was being held in the arms of the Good Shepherd.

That is a great story isn't it?
Some of you may easily identify with it, others, well; it's hard to think of ourselves as sheep.

If the Bible is going to compare us to an animal,
Why not the strong lion, mighty eagle, or faithful dog,
Or even the cutesy animals on baby stuff like monkeys, giraffes, or elephants?

Hey, Darwin even claimed we came from monkeys.
And we've been called busy bees, or told that we are as strong as an ox, or that we eat like pigs,
or act like rats, or we're going to the dogs, or that we fight like cats and dogs.

Some of those are not very flattering but to be called sheep?
Well we'll find in the Bible the most common animal metaphor for people is sheep.

Think of the most popular Psalm, Psalm 23 which starts, "The Lord is my shepherd..."

And then there is Psalm 100.3, "We are God's people, the sheep of his pasture..."
Psalm 79.13, "We your people and the sheep of your pasture will praise you forever."

And in one of Jesus' most popular teachings depicts a caring shepherd leaving his flock
in search of his little lost lamb.

80% of the population in Palestine were people in agriculture
and many of them were in some way connected to shepherds and sheep

So you would think they would understand
what Jesus was trying to say when he talks about the shepherd and the sheep.

Well, some of them did understand, only to well.
They were incense by his words and wanted to kill him.
John 10.33B, (MSG) **"We are not stoning you for anything good you did,
but for what you said-this blasphemy of calling yourself God."**

You see this wasn't just a nice little lovely, lamby teaching about God's care for people. Jesus was saying that he himself was God.

Others, believe it or not, still didn't get it.

John 10.6, **"Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them."**

They still didn't get it, but isn't that like sheep?

We see greeting cards, Christmas cards, and pictures of those sweet little lambs. The cute and cuddly little lambs are childlike and snowy white aren't they?

But the problem is we don't give much thought to the real character of sheep
let alone even think that we need to compare ourselves to sheep.
God forbid.

But let's think about it.

No insult is intended here but sheep are dirty, defenseless, and dependent. They can't keep themselves clean, so they're always unclean and always smell. What would happen to our little babies if we didn't care for them?

Sheep have no natural defenses, no claws, horns, or fangs;
no needles like a porcupine and not even a stink bag like a skunk.

They can only see about 40 feet in front of themselves.
They have no natural camouflage to hide themselves.
They are top-heavy which makes it more difficult to scamp and scoot when in danger.

Sheep are susceptible to all kinds of diseases,
and if you let them eat too much they will, and, they will get sick.

Sheep are temperamental.
They scare and panic easily, they're very simple-minded, and they're stubborn.

It is difficult to train sheep and they are easily distracted.
And yet when looking for a leader,
they'll follow a Judas goat at the drop of a bedoine's headdress.

They wander off a lot, get lost a lot, and even though rescued, they wander off again.
You think they would learn but nooooo, they tend to wander off again and again.
They just don't learn from their mistakes.
Their survival depends on their shepherd.

Any of that sound familiar to you?
Don't we get easily distracted? Don't we find plenty to worry about?

Some of our children wander off in a drug fogged world of their own?
We're full of financial fears and overwhelmed and tossed about by the storms in our lives?
With all of the wars and weather of our world don't we wonder what is going to happen?

We're more like sheep than we want to be, aren't we?

Isaiah 53.6 makes this observation,
"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way;"

In Matthew 9.36, we read of the compassion and concern of Jesus
**“When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them,
 because they were harassed and helpless,
 because they were like sheep without a shepherd.”**

Remember this too is his observation, not a statement of condemnation.
 Jesus isn't trying to put people down, he wants to pull them up.

We need a shepherd not only to get us through this life but into the next.
 And Jesus is the one who can do that, John 10.10b,
“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the fullest.”

John 10.27, **“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.
 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish;
 no one can snatch them out of my hand.**

He is the one we need to trust.
 There are those in our world who simply take advantage of others.
 The Bible calls them thieves.

Some may even provide services for us,
 but their motive is to do so is only for what they get out of it.
 The Bible calls them the hired hands.

We need a shepherd, who knows us, knows what we really need,
 has our best interests at heart, and protects, provides, and guides us.

Jesus would be that one, that Good Shepherd.
 He even says that he knows us and we know him.

John 10.11, **“I am the Good Shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me-“**

John 10.3-5, 14,
**“The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice.
 He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.
 When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them,
 and his sheep follow him because they know his voice...”**
 Sheep may not be too bright but if stressed, when the shepherd calls,
 they'll recognize that voice, trust that voice, and will follow.

Actually that is how shepherds proved ownership in Jesus' day.
 They didn't have have brands or marks.

Each shepherd had his own distinct call and that is how he separated his sheep
 when they mingled with other flocks at a waterhole or at night in the village sheep's pen.

In World War I some Turkish soldiers in the hills near Jerusalem stole a large number of sheep.
 The shepherd had been asleep, woke up, and realized what had happened,
 ran up into the hills, and saw the soldiers a few hills away with his sheep.

The situation seemed hopeless.
 They were armed and he was outnumbered.

So, the shepherd did the only thing he knew to do.
 He put his hand on his mouth and sounded his unique call.
 The sheep stopped, turned tail, and ran back across the hills to the shepherd.

Relationship is important isn't it?
 Think about families.
 Babies respond to their dad or mom's voice, maybe even grandpa's or grandma's voice.

It works that in the church too.
 At South Maple I was helping with Vacation Bible School.
 In this case I think the teacher probably wish I hadn't.

Everyone made a circle and one child in the circle was designated as the shepherd.
 Another child, the lamb, was placed in the middle of the circle,
 blind folded, spun around, and then told to listen for the shepherd's voice.
 When the lamb heard the shepherd's voice they were to go to the shepherd and collect a prize.

Now what made that hard to do was that everyone else in the circle
 were supposed to make enough noise so as to distract the lamb.
 Therefore the lamb wouldn't hear the shepherd's voice.

It was working. The "lamb" stood in the middle of the circle, confused,
 and unable to hear, unable to discern the shepherd's voice, and thus unable to even move.

I got this bright idea and said, "Hey John, its Pastor Tom its ok, just come over here.
 He did. He wasn't really supposed to, but he did.

I messed up the game but it actually proved the point,
 that sheep recognize and respond to the shepherd's voice.
 But I didn't get to play anymore that day.

One of the questions always before you and I is this,
 Do recognize and listened to the voice of our shepherd? Do we heard and heed the voice of God?

We can't claim ignorance.
 God has given us a sort of caller ID that enables us to distinguish His voice from that of **our** adversary,
 from the seductive voice the secular society, or from the voice within trying to satisfy self.

To make sure that the caller ID functions better we need to learn to keep it fine tuned.
 We can do that by spending more time with Him in worship, prayer, and Bible study.

Now there is another "I AM" in this passage.
 The Shepherd not only guides and provides but protects too.

In John 10.7,9 Jesus describes that for us,
"I tell you the truth; I am the gate for the sheep."
"I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.
He will come in and out and will find pasture."

Out in the country side when the sheep are bedded down for the night,
 they are enclosed in a pen of rocks and straw with a small opening.

The shepherd literally is the door way.

He lays down in that opening; controlling the going out and the coming in.
Thus literally the shepherd protects the sheep being the door or gate.

I hope you remember how Mandy and Mike used that image a few weeks ago.
They talked about parents, being that door,
Stopping, filtering what goes into their home on TV and internet.

They can invade our homes, attack the family structure,
destroy godly faith, family values and relationships, and rob our children of their innocence.

As I use the words above, "lay down, that brings to mind
a couple of other words that Jesus used in this passage, John 10.11b,
"The Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep."

He says it again a few verses later so this must be very important.
John 10.15B, **"and I lay down my life for my sheep."**
The shepherd is always ready to put his life on the line fighting off the predators for his sheep.

I want to close with a story of cowboy I once knew, his name was Glenn.
He was a cowboy who acted pretty much like the shepherd.

Glenn and his horse came up on a bluff, 30-40 feet above a waterhole.
Below was a steer swimming in circles, swimming around and around in circles
which sooner or later would bring about its death?

It was hopeless, the steer helpless.

Glenn saw the steer, sized up the situation, seized the moment,
and without a second's hesitation spurred the horse,
at great risk to both horse and rider dived into the waters of death below.
They survived the plunge and led the steer to safety.

Jesus put his life on the line for us. He plunged in the waters of death.
He was put on a cross and died, that he as our shepherd,
might lead us through the valley of the shadow of death; lead us from a real life to an eternal life.

So maybe it's not so bad being called sheep.
And maybe it's not so bad being sheep that need a shepherd.

I invite you to stand and sing the prayer, Savior like a shepherd lead us.