

April 25, 2021  
Fourth Sunday of Easter  
Good Shepherd Sunday  
Church of St. John the Evangelist, Elora  
Canon Paul J. Walker  
John 10:11-18 and Psalm 23

When Jesus identifies himself as a shepherd he wasn't endearing himself to many people in his culture. Shepherds were understood to be at the bottom of the social ladder. Shepherds were likely nomadic in nature; of no fixed address; someone you didn't really aspire to become. So it is a curious image to use except for the fact that Jesus modifies the description with the adjective "good."

*"I am the good shepherd."* It's one of the seven great "I am" statements in the gospel of John. It suggests that there were other shepherds who were not so good.

Jesus also contrasts the good shepherd with the hired hand who does not own the sheep, does not know the sheep, does not care for the sheep, and when danger approaches, the hired hand runs away and causes the sheep to scatter. In contrast, Jesus, the good shepherd, knows the sheep by name and brings them together. He describes that just like the Father and the Son know one another, so Jesus claims to know the sheep.

In fact, Jesus goes on to say that there's such a bond, a fellowship, an intimacy between Jesus and the sheep, that Jesus is willing to lay his life down for the sheep. This apparently is the trademark of

the *really* good shepherd - that he lays down his life for the sheep, and, just so they don't despair, he has this extraordinary and unique power "to take his life up again."

Clearly this is no regular shepherd. First of all very few shepherds have enough capital to own a flock of sheep; and if they did, even fewer would be willing to lay down their life for the sheep; and even if they went to that extreme, there's no shepherd who lays down their life and then has the power to take their life up again.

Jesus is not just providing a bucolic pastoral image of a lovely shepherd who, in contrast to the hired hand, watches over the sheep grazing on the grassy hillside, protects them from danger, and carries them to safety when they are injured. All that seems like a warm sentimental image, but there's something more substantial being presented here.

Instead we have a powerful insight into the relationship between God the Father and God the Son; and an insight into the purpose of God for the world. It is understood that God the Father and God the Son are one, an indivisible and eternal unity, bound together for all time. The sheep are invited into that fellowship.

It is also understood that in this unity there is a freedom to give. So Jesus describes God the Father as one who, out of love, commands God the Son to willingly lay down his life for the sheep; and

uniquely has given the Son the power to take his life up again. The whole purpose of this unique act of laying down the life and taking it up again is to draw all the sheep, even sheep from other folds, all together under one shepherd. So that “there may be one flock, and one shepherd.”

Just like God the Father is in union with God the Son, the entire purpose of God is to bring all of creation into this unity with God. And that happens through this unique act of the Good Shepherd willingly laying down his life and taking it up again. It is this act that brings us all into this eternal bond of intimate unity between the Father and the Son.

Just as the Father belongs to the Son, and the Son belongs to the Father, so you belong to God.

So, even though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, and even though you live through the sorrow of a global pandemic, you shall fear no evil, for you belong to God.

Even though you find yourself troubled by the presence of your enemies, and even though you are separated from loved ones, your head will be anointed with oil, your cup will run over with loving kindness and mercy, and you will dwell in God’s presence for ever.

For you belong to God - nothing ever changes it. It was the death and resurrection of Christ that made it all possible. Through that event God called us

into this fold. And in this fold God knows your name; and you know God’s voice and you follow it.

Because, as the psalm says, the Lord is my shepherd; therefore I can lack nothing.

Thanks be to God.



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We are praying for you today.