

the
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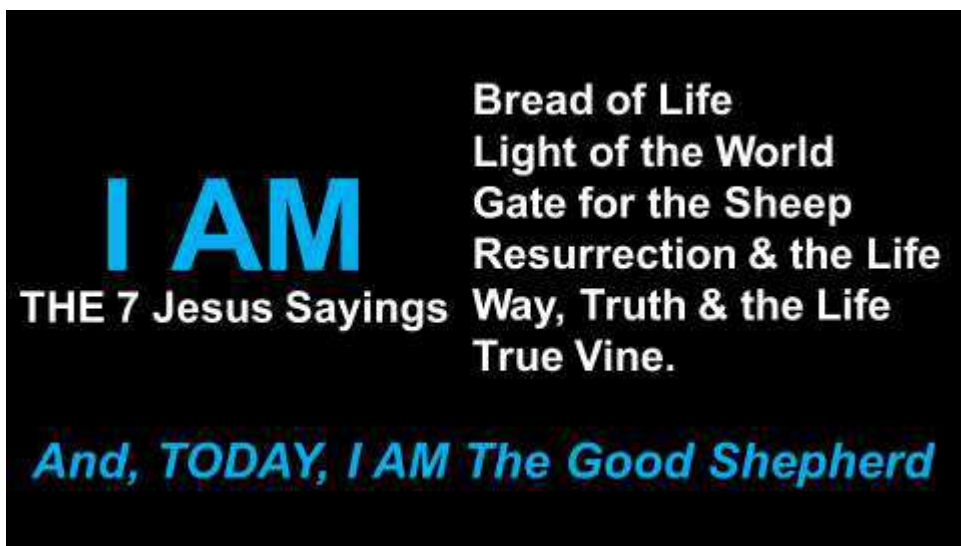


John 10:11-18

The Good Shepherd

**Vienna Presbyterian Church
The Rev. David Jordan-Haas
John 10:11-18**

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This morning, we're going to center ourselves on one of the seven of Jesus' "I AM" sayings in John's Gospel. "I AM" – it's the title of Yahweh, God

Himself—"ego eimi," I AM the "I AM." And the "I AM" for today is the only one of the seven to use a human title for Jesus. The other six "I AMs" are powerful I AMs, but they are inanimate images of Jesus! There are the "I Am the Bread of Life" (Stan, two weeks ago); the Light of the World; the Gate for the Sheep; the Resurrection and the Life; the Way, the Truth and the Life; the True Vine. Instead, this morning, it's Jesus' "I AM The Good Shepherd". But first, in the Hebrew world, the reality of the "Savior-Shepherd" is enormous. Shepherds and shepherding are referenced more than 200 times. When Israelites thought about the future hopes of a Messiah, they pictured a Shepherd, an "Ultimate Shepherd."

Here's the prophet Micah: "*He [the Savior-Messiah] will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God....The Shepherd will be their peace, And they will live securely*"(5:4-5). This is 750 years before Jesus! Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel – all of them describe Yahweh as their "Shepherd God", the One Who has "shepherded me all my life!" (Isaiah 40, Jeremiah 31, Ezekiel 34).

Here we are, John 10:11-18 (Dale Bruner's translation), some insights as I go:

I, I Am the Good Shepherd. Two Greek words for good: *agathos* = strong moral quality; but *kalos* = more than strong

moral quality! Meaning beyond beautiful and valuable – this *kalos* Shepherd is supremely lovely. King David was a good shepherd, *agathos*; but Jesus is both Shepherd and God, *kalos*—so here is Jesus, calling Himself a Good Shepherd; but He’s also calling Himself the Good God-Shepherd! Absolutely scandalous in His time!)

The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (Five times in only eight short verses! More later!) The hired hand, who is not a shepherd and to whom the sheep do not belong, sees the wolf coming, leaves the sheep in the lurch, and runs for his life. The wolf snatches the sheep and scatters them all over the place, and it is all because this person is a hired hand and doesn’t care a fig for the sheep. I, I Am the Good Shepherd, and I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me, and as I know the Father. (Greek *ginosko*, knowledge; but not practical or book knowledge; instead, *ginosko* is experiential, personal, intimate knowledge).

And I am laying down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep, who are not a part of this particular fold, and I must lead them, too,

And I am laying down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep, who are not a part of this particular fold, and I must lead them too, and they will listen to my voice, and then there will be one flock, one Shepherd.

and they will listen to my voice, and then there will be one flock, one Shepherd. You just heard Jesus’ missional-evangelistic strategy: Jesus loves the whole, wide world, and He is intent on using us, by His lead, to reach those who do not know Him, who do not yet know His saving love! Jesus wants us all to be one, one flock with one Shepherd.)

This is why the Father loves me so much, because I lay down my life so that I can take it right back up again. No one takes it from me. Oh no! I lay it down of my own accord. I have the authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it right back up again. In short, I received this special command from my Father.

**The Good Shepherd KNOWS US,
and the Good Shepherd SAVES US.**

So, let's organize the rest of our time by lifting up the two most defining characteristics of

the Good Shepherd: One, the Good Shepherd knows us; and, two, the Good Shepherd saves us. First, Jesus, the God of the universe, knows us in a personal, experiential, intimate way. There is no other god like our God, not in any other religion. He willingly leaves His high-in-the-sky, out-of-this-world life and comes low, in the person of a Shepherd. Only our God chooses an unnatural downward trajectory. Only our God chooses bone and skin, heart and voice. Jesus is the ultimate incarnational reality; forget the brilliant stars in the heavens, He wants to be down with us; He wants to be among us!

The Hebrew prophets knew the Shepherd-to-the-sheep relationship, and so does Jesus. He calls us “sheep” because God knows, with all His wisdom and compassion, we are like sheep: we are dirty, defenseless, dependent, and dumb. Sheep are dirty—their wool gets dirty and they can't do anything about it. Ask a sheep-rancher, sheep don't know how to get themselves clean once they're dirty. For us, it's hard to shake ourselves off from sin.

Sheep are defenseless—they have no means to protect themselves from the wolf. Sheep will stray away, right into the teeth of a prowling predator.

Sheep are dependent—they require more attention, more direction than any other domesticated animal; well, maybe on par with the goat, too! And with no real speed or quickness to get out of a jam!

Sheep are dumb—if left to themselves they will destroy themselves. Literally, with their nostrils in the dirt and



grass, chewing away, sheep will eat themselves right off a cliff, or into a rock crevice. So we confess where you and I have been “dumb.” I asked my wife, Connie, and she delighted in letting me know about the dumb things I’ve done. It’s a wonderful exercise to do with your wives! (CDs left in a rental car; prescription sunglasses into the ocean; forgotten where I hid the house keys outside; lost in the NC mountains along the Blue Ridge Parkway)

As only Martin Luther can put it: *“Christ alone must receive, strengthen, heal and help us poor sheep, therefore, we cannot, by our own strength and (feeble) works, (even pretend) to help ourselves”* (Joe Rodgers’ sermon and Bruner, p.622).

Jesus knows us personally—our propensities and capacities. He knows us intimately. Jesus knows us, all our failings and faults, and loves us anyway, despite ourselves!

In his book on marriage, Tim Keller describes God’s relationship with us as the way we are to be in relationship with one another: “When over the years someone has seen

you at your worst and knows you with all your strengths and flaws, yet commits him/herself to you wholly, it is the consummate experience. To be loved but not known is comforting but superficial. To be known and not loved is our greatest fear. But to be fully known and truly loved is, well, a lot like being loved by God [this is the true picture of the Shepherd-sheep relationship. Being fully known and truly loved]; it is what we need more than anything [else in life]....Being known by God, fortifies us for any difficulty life can throw at us” (Meaning of Marriage, p.100-101).



The Psalmist describes the Savior-Shepherd who will be with you and me in trouble, trial, tragedy (23, 91 and 100). Jesus doesn't ever take His eyes off of us. I know this to be true: The Good Shepherd, He will weep with me in my pain and sorrow. He will hold me when I am bereft, depleted, defeated. The Good Shepherd, He will carry me when I have fallen, when my body and spirit are spent. Even when we don't know it ourselves, Jesus knows that we cannot live without Him.

Second, the Good Shepherd saves us. He “lays down His life” for us. Five times Jesus speaks of this sacrificial love, in just eight verses! This is the core of *who* Jesus is: His life laid down, constantly, ultimately, completely!

During World War 2, the Nazis took 45-year-old Father Maximilian Kolbe, along with thousands of other Polish priests, and threw him into the Auschwitz Death Camp. The priests didn't live very long because the SS Officers forced them into hard labor, often forcing them to carry whole tree trunks from one place to another, all around the camp, morning through night. One day, when Father Kolbe,

weakened by hunger, slipped and fell, he was beaten and left for dead. Father Kolbe recovered, but was soon placed in Barracks 14, known as the last stop before execution or the gas chambers. On one particularly terrifying night, the Commandant entered Barracks 14 and announced to the prisoners that “Ten of you will die for him [Commandant] in the starvation bunker.” Known as the “death box,” prisoners were denied food and water; most died within 4-5 days.

As the Commandant singled out the ten men, one of the men pleaded and screamed for his life to be spared. In that moment, Father Kolbe offered himself: “I



would like to die in place of that man,” Kolbe said to the Commandant. Fr. Kolbe and the nine men were herded into that dark, window-less cell, the Death Box. The whole camp knew that past prisoners spent their final dying days howling, attacking each other, clawing at the walls in a frenzy of despair. But this time, those outside the Death Box heard the faint sounds of singing. For this time, it was said, the starving, dying prisoners had a shepherd who was gently leading them through the shadow of the valley of death. Father Kolbe was pointing them to the Great Shepherd (Lucinda McDowell, *Saved by Grace*, p. 96-97).

No matter what your present hard circumstances might be, know this, that the Good Shepherd is pointing the way for you, to the Father, who cares and is always there for you, with you. “Laying down His life”—this *is* Jesus’ single greatest gift to the world. Jesus steps in, in our place, and becomes the “Sacrificial Lamb.” We sheep, we deserve the Cross; but the Good Shepherd chooses to be our “substitute.” Jesus’ “suffering, sacrificial, downward, cruciform way” is “the

center of the center of” Christianity; the single greatest gift offered to the world (Bruner, p. 623).

So what is our “So What” response to this ultimate saving gift that Jesus gives to us? It is to follow the One Good Shepherd, who knows us completely and loves us despite ourselves. One, get started by simply being willing to getting to know the Good Shepherd in return. Two, get started by simply asking God to give us an awareness of His constant Presence. Three, get started by simply cultivating a devotion for God. Four, get started by simply praying for the desire to desire Him more.

PRAYER: Good God, help me, help us, by Your strength, to want to get to know You better; by Your mercy we’re asking for a greater awareness of You, help us. And, O Father, to devote ourselves to a deeper devotion to You, and a stronger desire for desiring You more, help us. We pray because of and in and through the Good Shepherd’s unlimited, inextinguishable, unimaginably extravagant love, for us. Amen!

What led Fr. Kolbe to offer his life to save another? We can’t know for certain, but we do know this, “the decision was the natural consequence of a character shaped by a life-long commitment to Jesus Christ.” How is the Good Shepherd-Jesus inviting you today to so live for others?

UNISON BENEDICTION: Hebrews 13:20-21

“Now may the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make you complete in everything good so that you may do His will, working among us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.”

**Laying down His life; Jesus’
“suffering, sacrificial, downward,
cruciform way” is the center of the
center of Christianity; the single
greatest gift offered to the world.**

— Dale Bruner, John’s Commentary