

Text: John 10:1-10. (EHV) Good Shepherd Sunday (Fourth of Easter.)
May 3, 2020.

Jesus is the good shepherd, who laid down his life for the sheep. Amen.

During World War II, there were special pilots called shepherds. Their job was to lead partially disabled planes back to base by flying alongside or in front of the disabled planes to ensure their protection and safety. Leading. Protecting. Those are the jobs our Good Shepherd, Jesus, does for us! He leads us to the perfect place of heaven. He protects us from the evil of false teachers, who try to tear us from his flock. But first, he needs to make us aware that we are sheep. And sheep need a shepherd. Sheep need a shepherd.

Maybe that's where we have to start on this Good Shepherd Sunday, explaining a sheep/shepherd picture that isn't quite so familiar to us. Sheep need a shepherd. I've been told that if one sheep wanders off a cliff, the rest of the sheep in the flock will follow. I wonder what father sheep say to their teenage sheep who are giving into peer pressure. "Hey, if the rest of your buddies walk off a cliff would you follow?" Well. Peer pressure doesn't go away when you turn 21 or 31 or 91. Adults just call it popular opinion or society. I've had people tell me, "I don't have to follow the Bible, because the law of the land has said otherwise for 100 years!" See, that's the other thing about sheep. Sheep are supposed to follow. Sheep need a shepherd. But so often we try to lead Jesus, instead of letting Jesus lead us. We think, "Jesus, I don't need to follow your outdated views about men and women. Jesus, follow my lead. Jesus, I'll follow you if you give me lots of money, but if I'm unemployed, you must not be very powerful. Why would I follow you?" We could go on and on with all the examples where instead of listening to Jesus we say, "Jesus, listen up! Here's what I have

to say.” And instead of seeing ourselves as lost, sinful sheep who need a shepherd, we think we are calling the shots for Jesus.

Praise God that he doesn't let us stay in that condition. Jesus, our good shepherd, forgave all the times we told Jesus to listen to us instead of us listening to him. Jesus laid down his life for the sheep. Every day, Jesus laid down a perfect life, so we would have the perfection we needed to enter this heavenly sheep pen. On one most wonderful day, Jesus laid down his perfect life so we would have the forgiveness we needed to be given free admission to the pasture of heaven. Then on the most wonderful day, Jesus took up his life again, rising from the dead and assuring our place in this perfect sheep pen. What a good shepherd! What a perfect shepherd!

What a wonderful shepherd, who does what a shepherd is supposed to do: protect, lead, and feed. There's a lot of pictures and imagery in this text and we don't want to be like many of the people who didn't understand what Jesus was telling them, but there also won't be time to explain every single aspect of the picture, so forgive me if I cover these quickly. The sheep pen for instance. This was usually a high stone wall connected to a house. High enough to keep the sheep in. High enough to keep thieves and robbers out. Often there would be thorny bushes on top of the walls, kind of like barbed wire on the top of a fence. Good protection, right?

Better to use the door, or the gate. Here's an interesting thing. The doorkeeper for the sheep pen is Jesus, who is also the door. He is the door. He guards the door. Notice that a door doesn't only let people in. The door and the doorkeeper keep people out. Jesus loves us enough to keep out thieves and robbers, those who want to rob our souls of certainty with false teaching. Those who would say, “You will go to

heaven, if you keep Jesus' commandments." Or, "Jesus dying on the cross means your sins can be forgiven." No! Your sins are forgiven! You will go to heaven, no ifs or ands. Jesus loves us too much to let that false teaching in.

Jesus loves you so much he knows your name. He called your name in baptism. He placed his name on you. He knows your name. I couldn't walk into a flock of sheep I had never seen and call them by name. I wouldn't see the slight scar on one from the scratch on the thorns. I wouldn't know which one is the likely leader off the cliff. But the shepherd knows. He knows the hurts. And he heals them. He knows the wounds and he winds his wonderful wrapping of love around them. Jesus knows us all by name. He gives us personal care and attention. He knows we are sheep. He knows we need a shepherd. He is that perfect shepherd.

In this illustration, Jesus constantly, carefully, with great concern goes back and forth between the shepherd and the sheep. Not only do we see what the shepherd does: lead and feed and protect. We also see what the sheep are like. The sheep listen and follow. Listen and follow. That's the role of the sheep. Think about that! Listen and follow. Listen and follow. We listen to the voice of the good shepherd. We listen to Jesus and we listen in the only place he has promised to speak. Do you know where that is? The Bible! Jesus hasn't promised to speak to you through weightlifting, or fishing, or running. Jesus has promised to speak to you through the Bible. We want to listen to Jesus, so we want to listen to the Bible. We listen when we hear popular things. God is love. Love your neighbor. But we also listen when our good shepherd, who loves us and laid down his life for us, tells us unpopular things. Men and women are differently created by God as part of his

wonderful wisdom to complete and complement each other. Marriage is a piece of paradise, that God set up with one man and one woman when the world was still perfect. That's a loving shepherd leading us. Our role as sheep is to listen to the loving voice of a loving shepherd. Our role is to follow that loving voice. I love how Jesus puts it. The sheep follow him because they know his voice. I pray that would always be said about me. I follow Jesus because I know his voice. That people would say, "There's a sheep who knows he's a sheep. He knows he needs a shepherd. And he has listened to the voice of the good shepherd so often and so well that he knows Jesus' voice and can tell the difference between the voice of Jesus and the voice of a thief or robber." I know that's a long monologue for someone to say. But wouldn't that be wonderful! I follow Jesus because I know his voice. And I will never, ever, ever, follow the voice of a stranger. Ever! Yes, Jesus is that strong in this negation: they will never follow the voice of a stranger. Jesus used the strongest possible negative he could and says it as emphatically as possible. They will never, ever even think about it. Ever. This wouldn't ever cross their mind. Stranger danger isn't a phrase invented a few years ago to keep children safe. Stranger danger was invented by Jesus to keep his children safe. And not only will sheep never, ever follow a stranger. They will run away. They will go the other way. If someone puts that if on there. You will go to heaven if you believe in Jesus and try your best. Run away! If someone says, "you can't be sure you will go to heaven." Run away! Not only can you be sure, you are sure, because Jesus lived and Jesus died and Jesus rose. There's no I. There's no if. There's no and. I know I said this before. But Jesus says this again and again. Amen and amen at the start. Amen and amen so we know Jesus is not just doubly serious, but doubly doubly

serious.

And even then, people didn't understand. And would you believe that's how Jesus wanted it? Jesus used this illustration to both conceal and reveal. Jesus said this often that he used these illustrations, these figures of speech, these parables because they would conceal the deeper meaning to some. To some who just wanted a nice story, the meaning was concealed. But to others, to those who yearned to learn, Jesus would reveal the deeper meaning and the figure of speech would drive it home that much more. We see that with this illustration right? Shepherd? Sheep? What's that all about? This wouldn't make sense to us. Concealed. Now, Jesus could have just said, "I love you individually. I want you to listen to my voice. I want you to follow me." And those would be nice points. And we probably would just easily let them go in one ear and out the other. But a sheep pen? Robbers? Doors? Shepherd? What's this all about? See, the picture helps reveal the meaning. Jesus loves you individually. Jesus wants us to listen to his voice. Jesus wants us to know: our role as sheep is to follow. Jesus' role as shepherd is to lead.

I am the door. Those who came before me, or those who want to go ahead of me, are not my sheep. My sheep follow me, not lead me. Can we just clearly point out the meaning of the three main groups or people here? Thieves and robbers: false teachers. Sheep: true followers of Jesus. Shepherd and doorkeeper and door: Jesus. Jesus says, "I am the door. I keep the thieves and robbers out. I let my sheep in. Whoever enters through me will be saved." Will be saved. Did you catch that? Will be saved. Not might if you do enough good. But will! It's certain. And will be saved. For the grammarians among us that's called a passive. The one being saved is not the one doing the saving.

Someone else is doing the saving: Jesus! And that's the best news of all. If I had to save myself, I could never do it. If it were up to me, I would never be certain I am saved. But because Jesus did it, I am certain. Because Jesus lived and Jesus died and Jesus rose, I am sure. I will be saved.

And this only happens through Jesus. There's another cool phrase, right? Whoever enters through me. You know, many times the shepherd was out in the open country with the sheep and the shepherd would gather a few branches or thorn bushes to make a temporary shelter of protection for the night. And the shepherd himself would lay himself down and sleep at the entrance. Talk about laying down your life for the sheep. Talk about putting yourself on the line. Jesus is saying to us sheep, "You are safe." Jesus says to the devil, "You have to go through me to get to my sheep." Guess who wins that one. Jesus even said to death, "You have to go through me. "Death didn't stand a chance! Jesus actually went through death and won. So death can't win when you through death. You will win. You will rise.

You will have life eternal. Life forever. Life with Jesus. That's the real life. What's abundant life? A life with abundant money? Abundant job security? Abundant social security? What about abundant eternal life insurance? An abundant life right now, with a perfect shepherd leading and feeding and protecting, a life of following one who laid down his life for you, a life of listening to the one who loved you so much he can't stand one second away from you? Life with the good shepherd. That's abundant life! Amen.