

Text: John 10:22-30. Good Shepherd Sunday. **Mary 12, 2019.**

Grace and peace are yours through Jesus, our Good Shepherd. Amen.

The Good Shepherd. What a cool picture! One of the most popular in all of the Bible. You could probably finish this verse from the Bible, "The LORD is my shepherd _____. I shall not be in want." Maybe you learned the song, "I am Jesus' little lamb." We even have Jesus as the Good Shepherd in one of our stain glass windows. But do we really know what this means, "Jesus is the Good Shepherd"? When was the last time you saw a shepherd, or sheep? Maybe this beloved picture isn't so common to us anymore. Why don't we let Jesus explain? The Good Shepherd picture has many points. The most important is this: The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. How cool is that! The shepherd dies for sheep who loved to wander. The Good Shepherd takes up his life again. The Good Shepherd rises from the dead. The Good Shepherd knows his sheep, personally, in great detail. The Good Shepherd gives his sheep eternal life. That's why we love this picture of the Good Shepherd. He lives for the sheep. He dies for the sheep. He rises for the sheep. He gives eternal life to the sheep. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, yes, what a cool picture indeed.

And kind of an odd situation for the Good Shepherd to give us this comfort. It starts with a challenge. It's the festival of dedication. This was an eight day celebration of the time about 200 years earlier when a man named Judas Maccabeus rededicated the temple and purified it after it had been defiled by sacrifices given to other gods. Now, this rededication could only happen after the Jewish people had taken political control of the country from foreign occupation. So this was mainly a religious festival, but there was also a political element. It was a time of spiritual renewal, but also a time of national fervor. You've almost certainly heard of this festival, but under a different name. An eight day Jewish festival in winter? Hanukkah Yeah, Jesus was at the temple to celebrate Hanukkah.

While he is there, just walking around, Jewish enemies surround him. They question him. They challenge him. "How long are you going to keep us in suspense?" Picture this scene. It's like a bunch of bullies in a back alley, surrounding Jesus. Only they surround him in the temple. And the question is overly dramatic. Literally it reads, "How long will you take away our souls?" Now, maybe that was just an expression, but come on! Taking away your souls? "If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." Quite a challenge. The word Messiah means anointed one. Messiah was the term for the chosen, promised, anointed Savior. The term was really a spiritual and religious one. But during times of foreign occupation, Messiah took on a political and earthly tone. And keep in mind the festival is a religious and a patriotic one. It's more likely the Jews are asking if he's the political messiah who will rid them of the Romans, just as Judas Maccabeus rid them of another foreign power 200 years earlier. Now, while the question, "Are you the Messiah," could be a curious question for understanding, we know from Jesus' response (and their own past and future actions) that it was a challenge to trap Jesus. If he says he isn't the Messiah, then why follow him? If he says, "I am the Messiah!" Well, then he's guilty of blasphemy and should be stoned to death! On the spot!

Do you hear the challenge? Are you listening to the conflict? Can you sense they have some conviction that Jesus is the Messiah, but the corruption of their own heart tips the scale to the not the Messiah? "If you are the Messiah, you haven't been the Messiah I want. Get rid of the Romans! Make our nation number one again! Then we'll believe you are the Messiah!" Doesn't that same challenge rise in our

hearts? Do you feel the same conflict? Is there some conviction in your heart about Jesus, but corruption often tips the scale? Jesus, you haven't been the Savior I want. Rescue me from surgery! My Savior wouldn't let his sheep suffer, what kind of Good Shepherd is that? Rid us of the Republicans! They only care about the rich. Rid us of the Democrats! They're running this country into the ground. As though the most important thing our Good Shepherd has to do is solve political problems on earth. And yet, and yet, and yet, from this challenge, Jesus brings the greatest comfort. Such comfort from such a challenge. First, Jesus addresses the challenge. You don't believe. He repeats that. You don't believe. You don't believe, so it doesn't matter what I say or what I do or what the evidence is. You don't believe. There's the problem. You want me to tell you plainly? Ok! Listen to my words. Look at my works. Hear my witnesses. Words. Works. Witness. I did tell you. Listen to my word. That's fascinating. Jesus was standing right there, could have done any miracle he wanted and what did he first direct them to? His Word. We have that same word, that works the same faith it did 2000 years ago, 6000 years ago. First, we listen to the Word. Then we can see the works. The works testify about me. Jesus healed a man born blind. Jesus fed 5000 men with a few slices of bread and couple of small fish. Isn't that enough? The Word. The Works. They both testify. This struck me. The Bible says elsewhere, "Every matter will be established by the testimony of two witness." Two witnesses were required in the courts. Well, Jesus had two witnesses. The Word. The Works. They witness. What more do you need? Yet, still they did not believe.

They did not believe. They kept on not believing, because they were not his sheep. Then Jesus pivots from the challenge to the comfort. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, describes the sheep. We're doing things in threes. Hopefully that's easy enough to remember. We just had word, works, and witness. Now we have three things about the sheep. They listen. They are known. They follow. My sheep listen to my voice. My sheep listen to my voice. That's the first thing Jesus, the Good Shepherd, highlights about his sheep. They listen to his voice. Listen means listen humbly. Obey. It means to keep on listening, even when the weather gets nice, you've already been confirmed and there's camping and graduations and summer. It means to listen to all of Jesus' words. Yes, some things are easy to listen to. God is love. God so loved the world. But what about other words of Jesus? Repent! You need to change your sinful ways. Jesus said that, too. The Good Shepherd loves you just the way you are, but he begs you, "Please don't stay that way." Listen to my voice. My word changes your heart and changes your life and changes your actions. Listen!

I know you. This is the word for personal knowledge, detailed knowledge, don't take it the wrong way if I say intimate knowledge. Jesus knows all about his sheep, yet he loves you anyway. The Good Shepherd knows who is prone to gossip and who is prone to drunkenness and who is prone to self-righteousness because they don't gossip or get drunk. The Good Shepherd didn't hide those sins. He died for them. He knows them. And he chooses to forget them, wash them clean in his blood on the cross. See, that's the best part about the Good Shepherd, he lays down his life for the sheep. He knows the sheep and calls us each by name. In baptism, he put his name on you and called you, just you, to be his sheep. That's the third comforting thing about the sheep. They follow him. Sheep need a shepherd. Sheep are defenseless, clueless, gullible. If one walks off a cliff, they literally all will follow off the cliff. But when there's a shepherd, whose voice they know, they will follow him. He will lead them to good pastures, in this case, Jesus' Word. He will lead them to quiet waters. In our case, Jesus' love. He will guide them through the difficulties in life. You see, sheep follow not only when it's easy, but they trust the shepherd

enough to follow him when it's difficult. Sheep follow at all times. When there's a raise, or a job loss. When there is health, and when there is cancer. When following Jesus makes you popular. And when people call you hateful. Follow Jesus. Follow the Good Shepherd. That's what sheep do. Why? What other person, place, thing, shepherd will give you what Jesus gives? I give them eternal life. Give. We don't earn it or work for it. Jesus gives it. Eternal life. Life means relationship. What better relationship to have than one with Jesus, who laid down his life for you on the cross? What better relationship to have than one that lasts for eternity? And what better relationship than one that is based totally on love? That's the relationship Jesus gives, fully and freely. What comfort!

Look at what this relationship offers in the future. You will never perish—ever! Ever! Ever! Jesus used the strongest negative he could possibly use. You won't perish. Ever! You are Jesus' sheep! You can't be lost. What comfort for the future. What comfort for now! No one will snatch you out of Jesus' hand. This too is spoken with great certainty. Another cool comfort. Just picture yourself in the hand of Jesus. He's got your back. He's got your front. He's got you. Right in his hand. You are safe, like a sheep with a shepherd. You are safe. In the hand of Jesus. You are safe. In the hand of God the Father. There's a good shepherd! He keeps you safe in his hand.

It would be good for us to address the final verse here. When Jesus says, "The Father and I are one." What does this mean? Is Jesus the Father? Is the Father Jesus? Is Jesus God? But isn't God God? Remember that Jesus is speaking a section for our comfort, not our confusion. Jesus and God the Father are not only one in purpose, they are one in essence. I know our hearts can raise all kinds of challenges. But turn those challenges into comforts. The Father is greater than us. He keeps us in his hand when challenges come that we can't confront on our own. Jesus keeps us close, even when our challenging hearts would draw us astray. It's not just one who's got you. It's two. Jesus and the Father. And remember, two witnesses are enough. Jesus and the Father both have you.

You know, this was the clearest statement Jesus ever made about his own divinity. It's the time Jesus said most clearly, "I am God!" And the Jewish challengers got it. After Jesus said these words, Jesus' challengers picked up stones to stone him. Wasn't the first time. Wouldn't be the last they tried to kill Jesus. That reaction, though, it takes us back to our opening question. What does this mean, "Jesus is the Good Shepherd?" And, "How will I react?" Will I rebel? I don't want to follow Jesus. I want to follow my own truth. I don't want to follow a Jesus who calls me a sheep. I want to do my own thing. Will I rebel, or will I rejoice? Will I gladly listen to the voice of Jesus, who lays down his life for the sheep, who gives us, gives, eternal life, who keeps us in his hand and won't let anyone snatch us away? Yes, from the challenge, the Good Shepherd brings comfort. Instead of rebellion, the Good Shepherd leads us to rejoice. Amen.

No one can ever snatch you out of the hand of the Good Shepherd, Jesus. Amen.