

It's been years, but I remember the man well. His life had been one trainwreck after another. Just the opposite of how Jesus wants His sheep to live. And yet that man was as much one of Jesus' flock as the most faithful Christians who have ever lived. For the first forty some years of his life no one would have believed it. But in the last two months of his life, Jesus took over. He brought this man to the church, to the pastor, to repentance, to Holy Baptism. And as he was dying, he was at peace and was full of joy knowing that he would soon be taken to heaven to be with Jesus.

Not your typical sheep. Not someone around which you can build a congregation. And yet someone who needs a congregation and the congregation's pastor. I wouldn't wish that man's life on any of you. But I do want, for all of you, what Jesus gave him in the end.

That man, all his life, was a sheep because Jesus knew him from eternity. No, he did not act like a sheep. He did not hear Jesus' voice for some forty plus years. Nor did he follow Him that whole time. But we need to stop looking at ourselves to see if we are sheep. You know, all white and fluffy. Never does Jesus say, "My sheep are the best! I'm proud of how they live. Is it any wonder why they are My sheep?"

God forbid that we ever put such words into Jesus' mouth! It's not the sheep who are good; it's the Shepherd. How good? He tells us in our Introit this morning. "*I am the Good Shepherd...and I lay down My life for the sheep.*" That's how good.

And if He laid down His life for the sheep, which He did, that means the sheep were bad, really bad. Not just needing a makeover. Needing the Son of God Himself to die on the cross for them.

And this He did for you. And He was wakened from death to shepherd you, to lead you through this valley, dark at times, to the home He is preparing in heaven.

Will He do this...for you? Will He take you to heaven? Yes! And not because you are so good, so white and fluffy. Stop looking at you. Look at Jesus. See Him dying for you. And listen to Him. Hear His voice and note well His promises. They are for you.

"*I give (My sheep) eternal life,*" He declares, "*and they will never perish.*" The forcefulness of His words in the Greek is as strong as it gets. "*(My sheep) will absolutely not perish!*" This is comfort to the highest degree.

And Jesus gives the reason why His sheep will never perish. Because His sheep are guarded both by Jesus and by the Father. "*No one will snatch (My sheep) out of My hand,*" He promises, and also this, "*No one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.*" The Father and the Son together, with the Holy Spirit, are a formidable force against anyone who tries to snatch Jesus' sheep.

This means you, Satan! You mess with Jesus' sheep, and you mess with both the Father and the Son. You will never be able to snatch Jesus' sheep away from Him and away from the Father.

And not just Satan. Jesus' promise is a guarantee even against ourself. Against our weaknesses and our doubts. The Father has given the sheep to Jesus. He has given you to Jesus. And not even our stumbling and fumbling ways can remove us from their strong hands.

So, does this give us an excuse to stop hearing Jesus and to stop following Him? You know, because we're busy. We have so much else that occupies us. But heh, since no one can snatch us away from Jesus, why should we spend so much time, or even any time, hearing Jesus and following Him?

But here's the thing about Jesus' sheep. They are not looking for excuses. "*My sheep hear My voice,*" says Jesus, "*and they follow Me.*" They do not look for reasons to avoid Jesus. They hear Him and they follow Him. Jesus says so.

But they don't hear and follow perfectly. Sheep are sinful. It's why Jesus died for them, for you and for me. And so, sheep are forgiven. You are forgiven. Everyone of you is forgiven.

And so is your loved one who may be a straying sheep right now. Don't give up on them. Jesus died for them, too. Remember that man, who in the last months of his life was brought into the sheepfold. Did Jesus quit on him? Absolutely not! This man was Jesus' sheep. And that's why He found this man before he died.

Don't quit on the straying sheep in your life. That's man's wife didn't. she brought him to her pastor. And that pastor will never forget him. He is Jesus' sheep. And so are you. Live like His sheep. And know, with joy, that He forgives your sins. Heaven is waiting for you. I don't know when, but I do know who. Your Good Shepherd will take you there. It's His promise to you. Amen.