

John 10:11-18

April 21, 2024

Shepherds, sheep, lambs. It can all be a little confusing. Jesus is a shepherd. “*The Lord is my shepherd,*” we say with David. “*The Good Shepherd,*” He calls Himself. And Jesus is also a sheep. The Prophet Isaiah writes of Him: “*Like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so He opens not His mouth.*” And Jesus is also called a lamb. “*The Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.*” “At the Lamb’s High Feast We Sing.”

But we, too, are called shepherds, sheep, and lambs. Jesus calls us sheep in our text. “I Am Jesus’ Little Lamb,” we sing. And a pastor is a shepherd in Scripture. Shepherds, sheep, lambs. Who actually is who? Are we confused yet?

This is where a picture in a window can help. Like the one behind me to my right. There can be no doubt about who the shepherd is in this window. It’s Jesus. And there should also be no doubt about the lamb in His arms. It’s you. I don’t care how old or how big you are. You are that lamb. And you are all sheep no matter how young or how tiny you are.

Today’s sermon is kind of a picture sermon. The depictions in the windows behind me. Yes, windows, not just window. We begin with the window to my right, but we will move to the other window directly behind me. We will let these beautiful windows preach our text this morning.

There is something special between the shepherd in that window and the lamb he is holding in his arms. You see it, don’t you? You do not see a sheep straining to jump out of his arms. You see a sheep content as content can be. There is no place that little sheep would rather be than right there in the arms of its shepherd.

Nor do you see a frightened sheep up there. This little sheep is convinced that it is as safe and secure as it could ever be. Let the wolf come, snarling and drooling. This sheep cannot be frightened into thinking that its shepherd will drop it, turn tail, and run away. That is no hired hand holding that lamb. It’s the shepherd, the Good Shepherd, Jesus.

This is the picture Jesus wants you to have. You are not just sheep. You are the sheep within the arms of the Good Shepherd. Your baptism places you there within His arms. And even if you are not as content as the sheep up in that window, or feeling as safe and secure as that little sheep appears to be, all is well for you because Jesus is no hired hand who cares nothing for the sheep. He is the shepherd, the Good Shepherd, and your place with Him is always secure in His strong arms.

In the picture up there, who belongs to who? We would say the lamb belongs to the shepherd. The sheep do not own the shepherd; the shepherd owns the sheep. Yet listen to Jesus’ own words in our text: “*I know My own and My own know Me.*” This word, *know* in the Greek is loaded with meaning. In this context it means to know with love, and also to love as one’s very own. Loving ownership, we can say. “*I know My own,*” says Jesus. So, yes, He owns the sheep. “*I know My own (sheep).*” You belong to Jesus. He owns you. Not like a piece of property. The word here is loving ownership. This is how the Shepherd knows His sheep; how Jesus knows you – with love.

But He goes on to say, “*My own know Me.*” And it’s the very same Greek word. The way Jesus’ sheep know Him is also with love. His sheep, His lambs love Him. And also this, loving ownership. The sheep actually do own their shepherd in a way. Jesus owns you and you own Him. You don’t simply call Jesus a shepherd. You call Him your Shepherd. “*The Lord is my shepherd.*” You belong to Him, but He also

belongs to you. Look at that little sheep up there. That lamb is happy and content. But just try and take its shepherd away from him, and you will have an angry little lamb on your hands. If you were to ask that lamb who its shepherd belongs to, it would say, "To me! It is my shepherd who is holding me!" Loving ownership.

And look also at what Jesus says in our text with regard to His Father. "*The Father knows Me and I know the Father.*" The way Jesus knows you, and you know Him, is a beautiful reflection of the love between Jesus and His Heavenly Father. Again, it's the same Greek word – lovingly know, loving ownership.

And yet your Shepherd owns you in a way that you do not own Him. He bought you. He paid for you. You did not buy and pay for Him. How did Jesus purchase you? He tells us: "*I lay down My life for the sheep.*" This is loving ownership to its full extent. You belong to Jesus because He laid down His life for you. And this, my friend, is why Jesus is the *Good Shepherd*. Good to His sheep, yes. Good for us to have as our Shepherd. But good, also, because His goodness takes Him from the window to my right to the window behind me. Only the Good Shepherd would die on the cross for the sheep. And only the Good Shepherd could give His life in exchange for the sheep.

This is because we sheep are not good sheep. We are bad sheep. Poor, miserable sheep. Sinful sheep. We are everything but good sheep. And so, only He who is good can exchange His life for ours. There were two bad sheep up there on crosses dying next to Jesus. But their deaths did nothing for us. Only the Good Shepherd could die for the sheep. Only the blood of the Good Shepherd could, and did, make full payment for the sins of the sheep.

And this explains why that little sheep up there to my right is happy and content in its shepherd's arms. That, my friend, is a forgiven sheep. Sinful yes, but forgiven. And that is why that sheep up there is you. I don't know exactly how bad you were last week, and I really don't care. Because all I know about you is that you are forgiven. I am looking out upon forgiven sheep. Sheep for whom the Good Shepherd laid down His life. Sheep for whom the Lamb of God bled and died on the cross.

I know you are not good sheep, just as you know this about me. And thank God we are not good sheep, because good sheep do not need a Good Shepherd. Bad sheep do. Sinful sheep need to be forgiven. And you are. Like the lamb up there in the arms of the Good Shepherd, you are, more than anything else, forgiven sheep.

And not just you; also your loved ones. Now maybe they do not know it. Or maybe they knew it once, but have wandered away from it. But they, too, have a Good Shepherd who loves them, and who laid down His life for them. And hear what He says in our text: "*I have other sheep...I must bring them also.*" Jesus is speaking of you and of your loved ones.

Now maybe your loved one is very much unlike the sheep up there in its Shepherd's arms. Perhaps your loved one has jumped out of those arms and maybe wandered away, perhaps is even lying injured and bleeding somewhere. Your prayers are the arms of Jesus. With your prayers, you place your loved one back in the arms of the Good Shepherd. And never forget that Jesus is the *Good Shepherd*. He loves all His sheep. He died for all His sheep, even for all sinners. And He seeks His sheep no matter how far they have wandered away from Him, or how bad they have become.

Those pictures behind me belong together. There is not a singly sheep, anywhere, who does not belong with Jesus in these pictures. And it truly is because Jesus is the Good Shepherd. Amen.