

**John 10:14, 15b** (Introit)

I wounded a toad last week. I did not intend to, yet it was my fault. I may have even sent the toad to its death. I was mowing my lawn when I saw the toad. It's leg had been cut off by my mower. I did not aim my mower for the toad. I was only trying to mow my lawn, but nonetheless it's because of me that the toad was injured. And what's worse, prior to this I spotted a garter snake in the area. I didn't kill it. It avoided my mower and slithered away. But now it may find the toad, and because the toad was wounded, by me, it may be an easy victim for the snake.

I don't know, it's possible that I have wounded many toads over the course of time. This one I know for certain was injured by me, but others may have been as well. I am unaware if I did. And yet, by my own hand, other toads may have been wounded. And so, unaware or not, it's still my fault.

If you are one of those toads, I'm sorry. Sometimes a man with a mower can become so focused on getting the job, done that he is not as careful as he should be about avoiding the toads God has placed before him. Now before I go any farther with this toad analogy, let me here take this sermon over to our text and use the animal that Jesus uses. You are not toads; you are sheep. Jesus' sheep. And sometimes I, as Jesus' undershepherd, forget that as sheep, you have wounds of various kinds. Some of those wounds are surface injuries. Some of them go very deep. Some of them were caused by me. Focusing on getting the job done, the work done here, I have, by my own fault, injured Jesus' sheep. And whether I was aware of it or not, it happened by my own hand, by my words, my actions. And thus, it is my fault, and I am sorry.

You are Jesus' sheep, and so I want you to know that you are precious to me because you are precious to Him. This is why I like the sheep analogy better. It would be hard for me to say that you are precious toads. But it's a wonderful thing that Jesus calls you His sheep. How precious are you to Him? Well, He died for you. *"I lay down My life for the sheep,"* He says in John 10:15. That's pretty precious.

This statement of Jesus, that He lays down His life for us sheep, should not give us big heads. It should humble us because it begs the question, "Why did He have to die for the sheep?" If you and I were perfect little sheep, there would have been no need for God to die for us. But we're not. And so the Good Shepherd dies for the sinful sheep.

I think that we take that word for granted. I know I do. The word 'good.' Jesus is not the bad Shepherd. He is not the unconcerned Shepherd, nor the proud Shepherd or incompetent Shepherd. He is the Good Shepherd. All the other words describe the sheep. Bad, unconcerned, proud, incompetent, and any other word like these. The one word that does not describe the sheep is the word 'good.' But of course, good sheep do not need a Good Shepherd. Only bad sheep do. Only sheep who are in trouble. Sheep who like to wander away. Sheep who do not want to do what they're told. Sheep who are wounded and dying. And that's us. Even if you are in the prime of life, you are a dying sheep. We all are. We begin to die the moment we're born. Some sheep die sooner, some later. But all sheep die because all sheep are sinful.

Our Good Shepherd did not have to die. That's what makes Him so good. He lays down His life for the sheep. No one takes it from Him. Jesus freely, of His own will, dies for every one of us. That's as good as it gets. We do not have a Shepherd who says to us, "Oh, you're dying because of your sin? Well good luck with that!" No, Jesus loves His sheep. He cares deeply for them. So deeply that He

became wounded for us. Our Good Shepherd becomes one of us--not just a sheep--a Lamb to be sacrificed. The true Passover Lamb, so that you escape the bitter pains of eternal death.

It's no coincidence that your Good Shepherd died for you on Good Friday. It was bad for Jesus, but good for you. Everything about Jesus is good. The day He died. The way He died. Those for whom He died. And the glorious truth that death could not hold Him, and so it cannot hold you.

*"I know My own,"* says Jesus. He knows everything about us, and still He chose to die for us. He doesn't know you the way you know Him. Our knowing is imperfect. His is not. Our knowing does not put Him at the heart and center of our life, of our being. His does. Jesus knows you not just with His head; He knows you with His heart. You are not simply in His head so that He thinks about you now and then. That's more the way we know Him. Jesus made a place for you in His heart. Not in spite of our sinfulness, but because of it. Not in spite of the way we sheep love to wander from Him, but because of it. Jesus dies for sinful sheep, for wandering sheep. He dies for you and me not in the hopes that we will try harder to be better sheep. No, He lays down His life for us because He knows us all too well. He knows your wounds, your fears, your secret sins and mine as well. But this is why He dies. Because He knows you as His sheep--weaknesses, wounds, sins and all.

I may be unaware of all your wounds, all your fears and concerns. I don't know all your sins and weaknesses. But one thing I do know--you are forgiven sheep. All of you are. Your Good Shepherd made sure of it. He laid down His life on a cross for you. And then He baptized you into that very death, and into His resurrection.

Our flock here is not the strongest flock in the church. But then no flock is. Even those sheep who seem to have it together, they are just as weak, and sinful, and full of wounds as the rest of us. But there isn't one of you, no matter how small and insignificant you may feel, no matter how sinful and injured you are...there isn't one of you who is not known by Jesus as His dear, precious sheep. And there isn't one of you who has wounds so deep that Jesus cannot heal them, or sins so great that Jesus cannot forgive them. Jesus is not just the Good Shepherd; He is your Good Shepherd. Amen.