

## John 10:22-30

Jesus' sheep have it made. Not all the wealth and honor of the world is better than being one of Jesus' sheep. For to them He gives eternal life. Jesus' sheep are precious to Him. He knows them. Even from eternity He knows them. Jesus' sheep are given to Him by His Father, and they will never perish; no one will snatch them out of Jesus' nail-pierced hands.

To be one of Jesus' sheep is to belong to Him; to be a part of His flock, His church. Jesus' sheep don't have it easy in life. They're picked on, ridiculed, persecuted. What was done to the Shepherd will be done to the sheep. So don't imagine that life as a sheep is a peaceful trot through a happy valley. Life here is the "*valley of the shadow of death*," and through this valley Jesus leads His sheep.

And yet Jesus' sheep have it made. For on the other side of this valley lies heaven. And Jesus' sheep do not wonder if they will make it there; they know they will, because they trust their Shepherd, and He promises: "*I give (My sheep) eternal life, and they will never perish; no one will snatch them out of My hand.*"

So here's the question: How do I know for certain that I am one of Jesus' sheep? It's not for us to wonder. It's not for us to come up with all sorts of answers. Jesus answers it for us. "*My sheep hear My voice...and they follow Me.*"

The Jews heard Jesus speak. In the temple they gathered around Him with hostility. "*Are you the Christ or not!*" they demanded. "*I told you,*" Jesus replied, "*but you do not believe because you are not part of My flock. My sheep hear My voice...*"

Many people heard Jesus then, and many hear Him preached today, but only His sheep believe. They hear, not as a critic hears a preacher of the Gospel, but as an infant hears the soothing voice of its mother, and turns to that voice with complete trust.

It's good for us to take note what Jesus does not say about His sheep. He doesn't say, "My sheep live perfect lives." Nothing of the kind! Jesus' sheep are full of sin. They mess up, royally at times. There are times when a sheep of Jesus goes to bed at night and feels so awful that he or she wonders: Am I really Jesus sheep?

Some of the worst sins ever committed were done by sheep belonging to Jesus. That's not what Jesus wants of His sheep. He expects His sheep to abide by the Ten Commandments. But He does not reject His sheep for falling into sin. That's why He came. To "*lay down My life for the sheep,*" He says. There is nothing in your life, no matter how bad it is, that disqualifies you from being one of Jesus' sheep. Jesus forgives you. He laid down His life for you.

And this is where your life comes from - from Jesus' life laid down, and taken up again in resurrection. Jesus does not say, "My sheep earn eternal life." Nothing of the kind! He says, "*I give eternal life to them.*" That's why you're here. If sheep had a part in earning life for themselves, we would need to spend less time here with Jesus and more time out loving our

neighbor. In fact, sheep wouldn't really need their Shepherd at all if earning eternal life was up to them.

But it's not. Jesus gives life to His sheep. And that's why you were brought to your Shepherd in Holy Baptism. And taught to recognize His voice through His (not Luther's, but His) teachings in the Catechism. That's why your Shepherd draws you to His altar to receive His body and blood which He laid down for you. And that's why He puts His words into your ears, for He says, "*My sheep hear My voice.*" Through these Jesus is the One who is giving you eternal life.

Now we sheep, we mess up here with Jesus' words. We take the last part of His words, but not the first so much. "*I give them eternal life, and they will never perish.*" We like these words and we grab hold of them. But we mess up, and dangerously so, when we separate them from His words preceding these: "*My sheep hear My voice...and they follow Me.*" We try to cut this text in half. But we can't do that. We dare not do that! Jesus' sheep are those to whom He gives life, yes. And He knows them. And His sheep, with faith like an infant, hear and follow His voice. You cannot separate these. We cannot take the eternal life Jesus gives but neglect the hearing of His voice. You can't have the one without the other.

But you see, the sheep already know this. They come when the Shepherd calls. They're not dragged to the Shepherd kicking and screaming. They're not giving one excuse after another why they have no time to hear the voice of the Shepherd. When Jesus calls, His sheep hear His voice and they follow Him.

And here's why. Because sheep need Jesus. We need forgiveness. We're poor, miserable sheep, you and I. We've abandoned our Shepherd. We've made a mess of the Ten Commandments. We need our forgiving Shepherd. And that's exactly who He is. He always forgives. You are here with all your faults, as am I. But Jesus is here with mercy for you. And His mercy is greater than your sinfulness. He forgives every one of you. This is no license to sin. A forgiven sheep does not follow after sin. It follows its Shepherd because it loves its Shepherd.

"*Today,*" cries the psalmist, "*if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.*" That "*today*" is now. The voice of your Shepherd is calling, inviting. "*My sheep,*" says Jesus, "*hear My voice...and they follow Me, and to them I give eternal life, and they shall not ever perish; no one can snatch them out of My hand.*" Amen.