

John 10:14, 15b

April 25, 2021

There are two stained-glass windows behind me. Which one depicts Jesus as the Good Shepherd? Don't they both? "*I am the Good Shepherd. I know My own and My own know Me.*" These words are conveyed by the window to my right, Jesus holding His beloved sheep. "*And I lay down My life for the sheep.*" These words point us to the other window with Jesus on the cross. The two windows belong together. They dare not be separated from each other. Do you know why?

That sheep which Jesus is holding in His arms looks very content, don't you think? Not a care in the world. And nothing wrong with the sheep. No blemishes. No wounds. No broken limbs. As far as we can tell.

Is this you? Are you perfectly content like that sheep? No worries? No concerns? No troubles? No cares whatsoever? And are you completely intact? No aches and pains? No cuts and bruises? And not just on the outside. Are you not hurt on the inside? Not broken in here in any way?

That's not you, is it? Nor is it me. Jesus' sheep do not have an easy, carefree life. We face the same problems others face who are not sheep.

Now maybe we think that because we are with Jesus, as that window shows us, even being carried by Him through life, that we should be as perfectly content and carefree as that sheep up there.

But we're not, are we? I know I'm not. Not all the time. And that just makes me feel guilty comparing myself to that sheep up there. I should be like that, and all the time, but I'm not. At times, my problems get to me. I become anxious. I grow frustrated. I feel edgy. I lose patience. I am a far cry from that perfect little sheep up in the window. Sometimes I hate that sheep. He's too content. Life is too easy for him. Why can't he be more like me, with all the pains and problems I deal with?

There is something else about me that I do not see in the sheep up in the window. I happen to be a straying sheep way too often. I am a rebellious and stubborn sheep, although I'm not at all proud of that. The bottom line, I am a wretched, selfish, and self-centered sheep because I am a sinful sheep. I am not, in any way, the perfect little sheep he appears to be.

Now I invite you, at any time, to take your finger and point it toward yourself and say, "Yep, that is me too! I am all those same things. I, too, am a filthy, little sinful sheep."

So here is what we need to do. Stop fixating on the window on my right and instead gaze intently at the window behind me with Jesus on the cross. There is our Good Shepherd. And there we see Him laying down His life for His sheep.

When we first enter the church to worship, how comforting to gaze first at that window. And as we leave the Divine Service, with Jesus' own benediction, how good to see His arms there outstretched in benediction for us all.

There Jesus is dying, and for whom? For stubborn sheep. For straying sheep. For rebellious sheep. He dies for His sheep who become anxious and afraid, who get frustrated in life, who lose their patience, who say and do things they later regret. He is dying for me, and He is dying for you. None of you is excluded. Each of you is one for whom Jesus laid down His life on the cross.

And so we can now look at the other window, up on the right, Jesus holding His precious sheep. You see, that little sheep up there, he really is me, and he really is you. And it's because he is not a perfect little sheep, but he is a forgiven sheep.

The reason we do not see anything wrong with him is because of the window behind me. Jesus hung on the cross to restore His sheep, to make everything right again, so that aches and pains, wounds and brokenness, without and within, are only temporary. And so they really are not the problems we sometimes think they are. Because none of those things can ever tear us away from our Good Shepherd. Nor can your sins. You see, the one thing you are above all else, is a forgiven sheep. Jesus laid down His life for you.

Maybe your life right now is far from peaceful. But God is at peace with you. He forgives you. And the window on my right, with Jesus holding His little sheep, that picture conveys this beautifully. That is why the two windows go together. You can't have one without the other.

As you come up for the Sacrament this morning, look at the window behind me. There is your Good Shepherd giving up His life, His blood for you; that which He gives you here in bread and wine.

This is why you can depart in peace, like the sheep up there in Jesus' arms. He is your Good Shepherd. He knows you and you know Him. And He laid down His life for you. Amen.