

John 10:11-18

There is no greater blessing than being a sheep; a sheep that belongs to the Good Shepherd. And this is who you are by the grace of God. Here you are being made to lie down in the green pastures. Here you have been led to the still waters. Your Good Shepherd has prepared His table before you. His cup for you overflows with goodness and mercy. You have no want, for He restores your soul. And He is with you, and you are safe in Him. And all this is because your Shepherd is good.

If this is where we could leave it, all would go well for us. But we're sheep. And so we don't leave it there. We hear our Shepherd's voice, but not very well. We follow our Shepherd, but not as well as we should. And here's why... Three times in our Gospel text we hear the word *good*. Yet not once is it applied to the sheep. It's the Shepherd..He's the one who is good.

We sheep are many things. A whole lot of adjectives can be placed here. Wandering sheep, selfish sheep, rebellious sheep, stubborn sheep, sinful sheep, bad sheep. We sheep are all these things and more.

Now here's what we like to do. We like to swap adjectives. We steal the word *good* from where it belongs with the Shepherd, and we place it with ourself, so that we become good sheep. We're always hearing this at funerals held for those who are of the world. That's what a eulogy is: good speech, good words about the one who has died. That word *good* is taken away from the Shepherd where it belongs, and placed with the one in the casket. A eulogy for those who are of the world, comforts the bereaved by stripping away all those negative adjectives and placing the word *good* in front of their loved one.

But even though we sheep are many things, that word *good* is not one of them. If it was, then the Good Shepherd would not have had to lay down His life for the sheep. A good sheep does not need a Good Shepherd. A bad sheep does.

When you come here to sit in the pew, you sit among bad sheep. You hear a bad sheep preach to you. You commune at the altar with bad sheep. If we were not bad sheep, we wouldn't be here. We would have no need for Holy Baptism, Holy Communion, and Holy Absolution. If we were good sheep (although there is no such thing), we could do whatever we want on Sunday mornings because we sure would not need to gather here around the Good Shepherd.

But if you are His sheep, then you must take the word *bad* that goes with it, and you must apply that word to yourself. Positive thinking here is not going to help; it's going to hurt. We must accept the truth that we are selfish, stubborn, wandering, sinful, bad sheep.

And this is why we need Jesus. It's okay to be a bad sheep because you have a Good Shepherd. He lays down His life for you. Five times in our Gospel text He says this. Five times Jesus speaks about laying down His life for the sheep. This is why He is good. Jesus is your *Good* Shepherd because He lays down His life for you.

And it's not because, "Hey, I'm worth it!" A sheep in the Holy Land was not a prized possession. It certainly was not worth a shepherd losing his life over it. A sheep could always be replaced. Lose one, and you have plenty of others, and more on the way.

This is how Jesus could see it. "I have plenty of sheep. If one wanders away, or if one is snatched by the wolf, hey, it's not worth that much anyway." But He doesn't. He doesn't see it this way. To Him, each and every one of you is priceless. How priceless? He laid down His very life for you. Not just you, and you, and you...you too! Yes, you - the extra bad sheep. The sheep who has been a handful; who has given your Shepherd fits as of late... And you know why.

How easy it would be for Him to just wash His hands of you. To even whisper to the wolf: "Hey wolf, this here sheep has been such a problem to Me...if you want this one, I'm going to close My eyes while you grab him." Can you imagine? No, you can't, because it would never happen. Not as long as He is the *Good* Shepherd. And He is, and always will be the Good Shepherd.

Is He your Shepherd? There are days when we act as if He is not. We follow other shepherds. We listen to false shepherds. We give them our full attention. We listen to what they teach. We let them lead us and guide us. But these are all lacking one thing...they are not shepherds who are good. You have one Good Shepherd. He's the one who laid down His life for you. He's the one who baptized you. He's the one who gives you His body and blood in the Sacrament. He's the one who forgives your sins; who calls out after you when you wander away from Him; who leads you back to His flock. And who is not angry at you, but forgives you. Every time you sin He forgives you. Jesus is what's good about being a bad sheep.

So how do we live...like bad sheep? "Well, since I'm a bad sheep, I may as well act like one." That would be true only if we did not have a Good Shepherd. We cannot steal the word *good* from our Shepherd because He freely gives it to us.

When we have a Christian funeral, we speak of the one in the casket as belonging to the Good Shepherd. As one who is declared righteous in Christ; who is seen as good and holy in the eyes of God because this precious sheep who has died is covered in the blood of the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for him.

And since this is true of all who die in Christ, is it not true of us who live here and now in Christ? Act like the sheep you are... A bad sheep forgiven by your Good Shepherd. A sheep who is called to follow Jesus every Sunday, yes, but also every Monday through Saturday. Live like the priceless sheep you are. And see others in the same way. Is this not the life to which we are called in our Baptism?

Goodness and mercy will follow you all the days of your life. This is because your Shepherd is good. Let us, therefore, put all things that are bad away from us, as our Good Shepherd is seen through how we live, and how we speak, all the days of our life. Amen.