

John 10:14,15b (Introit)

He was in his late fifties, maybe early sixties. He had been around. You could tell from the look around his eyes and from the way he spoke. Could he take a look inside the church? He had heard people talking about “their” church, but he always thought that church was for women and children, and for old people ready to go, or for the sick. Well, he was sick now, sort of. Could the Reverend show him around? Things had not gone too well for him lately; for a number of years as a matter of fact. He had been in and out of a couple of marriages. Two kids, both living in different parts of the country. They don’t write, call, or visit. But he had made plenty of money. Had spent a lot, too. It wasn’t that he needed anything from the church. He just wanted to look around, maybe get a lift.

The pastor took him around, explained the various furnishings and symbols. On the tour he stopped before a stained-glass window depicting a man with long hair holding a sheep in his arms. “That,” said the pastor, “is a representation of Jesus as the Good Shepherd.” “What’s so good about Jesus?” the man was searching, asking for help. This is really why he had come there that day. This is why he had stopped to talk with the Reverend. He was needing something good in his life.

What would you have told him? You have heard these words of our text many times...the words of Jesus, “I am the Good Shepherd.” Whenever you come here to church you see the stained-glass window behind me. What would your answer be if some lost, wandering sheep were to ask, “What’s so good about Jesus?”

It was the kind of man He was. How do we measure a man? By the number of home runs he has hit? The number of passes he has completed? The amount of money he makes? The number of trophy bucks he has hanging on his wall? We do not know what Jesus looked like; whether He was tall or short, the color of His eyes, the length of His hair. He wrote no books, owned no property, held no public office. All we know about Him is that which was written about Him by those who loved Him and followed Him. He never sinned, not once. He went to church faithfully. He was often in prayer. And He had power...a lot of power. But He never used it for Himself. He only used His power to help others. He made sick people well. He drove out vicious demons. He even raised dead people to life. He used His power to show people that they should listen to what He had to say because He was the Son of God.

Then there was the way He dealt with people. People do not like to be pushed around, and used, and ridiculed. That happens all around us, and even to us. Someone taking advantage of someone else. People laughing at you behind your back. Jesus was different. He loved people, all people, even those people nobody else loved. There was this man, Zaccheus. A wee little man that nobody liked. Zaccheus climbed a tree in order to see Jesus because no one would let him get close to Him. And Jesus stopped and called to Zaccheus. “I must stay at your house,” He told him. Nobody loved Zaccheus, but Jesus did.

Maybe you do not feel loved very much by other people. Maybe there is good reason why you are not much loved right now. You’ve turned people off. You’ve offended people, even those close to you. Jesus loves you. He is not offended. He is not turned off. A good shepherd loves and embraces even the worst of his sheep. Jesus is your Good Shepherd and He loves you.

Even when He told off the Pharisees and Scribes, He was showing them love. They needed telling off. They were taking the wrong path in life. And maybe you are too. If Jesus’ words hurt you, if

His Law accuses you and you don't like it, it's because He loves you. All of us need telling off by God again and again because all of us like taking the wrong path in life all too often.

One of Jesus' closest followers, a man by the name of Peter, took the wrong path. Once he denied knowing Jesus. Three times he did this. And Jesus gave him a stern look; a look that brought tears to Peter's eyes. But Jesus did not stop loving Peter. He forgave him. He restored him as a disciple. He even told Peter to feed His sheep.

Then there was the way He died. It was the way He died and why He died. Jesus was not guilty of any wrong, but He was convicted and condemned by evil men. They told lies about Him to the Roman ruler. He could have gotten away. He could have used His power to escape. But He refused. It's because of what He says in our text, "I lay down My life for the sheep." Jesus was no sinner; His sheep are the sinners. You and I are. But that's what's so good about Jesus. He took the abuse we deserved. He died on a cross in our place. He went to the place of torment--He was forsaken by God--and He did this for us. For the worst of us, and for the best of us.

Jesus was punished for all of His wandering sheep. For the man who went to the Reverend's church to look around. For the woman who was caught in adultery. For a thief dying on a cross next to Jesus. And if you have ears and a beating heart, and if you are a sinner and you need something good in your life, then you, too, are one for whom Jesus died. He is your Good Shepherd no matter how bad you have been; no matter how lost you are; no matter how far you have wandered. What's so good about Jesus is that He forgives you, not because we deserve it, not because we earn it--He forgives you because He is good and merciful, because He died on a cross for you.

And if some poor, lost, wandering sheep stumbles across your path and wants to know what's so good about Jesus...or if you happen to be that poor, wandering sheep...in either case, what's so good about Jesus is everything here that has been said, and more, much more. But for now, and for us, it's good enough to hear Jesus say it like this: Why am I the Good Shepherd? Because I lay down My life for the sheep. Amen.