

# HOW TO RECOGNIZE YOUR GOOD SHEPHERD

April 21, 2024

Rev. Piet Van Kampen

First Lesson; Acts 4:23-33

Psalm of the Day; Psalm 23

Epistle Lesson; 1 John 3:1-2

Sermon Text; John 10:11-18

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father, and from our risen Lord Jesus Christ, our Shepherd, and our King.

Our lesson that we will consider for today's sermon is our Gospel Lesson from John, chapter ten, verses eleven through eighteen. This is the Word of our Savior.

I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. The hired man, who is not a shepherd, does not own the sheep. He sees the wolf coming, leaves the sheep, and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the sheep and scatters them. Because he works for money, he does not care about the sheep.

“I am the Good Shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me (just as the Father knows me and I know the Father). And I lay down my life for the sheep. I also have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. Then there will be one flock and one Shepherd. This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life so that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have the authority to lay it down, and I have the authority to take it

up again. This is the commission I received from my Father.”

These are your words, Heavenly Father. Sanctify us by your truth.  
Your Word is truth.

Amen

Every week, when you enter this sanctuary for worship, you pass beneath this stained glass window in the Narthex. Yet, do you ever really stop to take a close look at the picture in that stained glass window? You take a look, and you see, obviously, it is Jesus. But, what is Jesus doing in the picture? He is carrying a lamb on His shoulders. The picture we have is of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. It is one of the most iconic images in all of Christianity. Really, if we think about it, it is one of our favorite ways to think about Jesus. When we introduce our children to Jesus, that is who we introduce them to, isn't it?

### **Jesus, the Good Shepherd.**

So, in our homes, (or if we are teachers) in our classrooms, we hang pictures of Jesus standing in a pastoral scene, with His shepherd crook in His hand, standing amidst the flock of sheep, and maybe even carrying a sheep over His shoulders, like this picture.

### **Jesus, the Good Shepherd.**

We love that image of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. We love it so much even in our own lives, with the faith of a child.

We just sang this last hymn, *The King of Love My Shepherd Is*.

We memorize the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, and we expect, no demand that Psalm be read at our funeral. We love this image of Jesus carrying His sheep. We love this image of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. That is how we like to think of Him.

And yet, do we ever really stop to think about what specifically makes Jesus the Good Shepherd? What is it that makes a shepherd good? What is it that sets Jesus apart of every other so called

shepherd out there in the world today?

In John, chapter ten, (*John, chapter ten is often called The Good Shepherd Discourse, where Jesus talks about Himself as The Good Shepherd*) in this portion of John, chapter ten, we really get to see how to recognize our Good Shepherd for who He is. For starters, the first thing, when we think about our Good Shepherd is how well He knows His sheep. Starting in verse fourteen Jesus says,

**“I am the Good Shepherd.**

**I know my sheep and my sheep know Me,**

**(just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father).”**

Jesus is saying He knows His sheep as well as the Father knows Him. You think about how close that relationship is between God the Father, and God the Son. Just a few verses after our reading, Jesus is going to say,

**“I and the Father are one.”**

Not that they are the same person, but in mind, Will, and desires, they are united. They are in perfect sync with each other, and have a perfect knowledge of each other. That is how Jesus knows His sheep, how well He knows His sheep. He knows who they are, and He knows each and every one of them inside out, just as they know Him.

Jesus even knows the sheep that are His that are not even part of His flock yet. He says,

**“I also have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen.**

**I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice.**

**Then there will be one flock and one Shepherd.”**

You know who Jesus is talking about there, right? He is talking about us, the Gentiles. We are the other sheep that are now, by the grace of God, in Jesus Christ, brought into the one flock, under the one Shepherd, because Jesus sought us out, and called us by His voice, by the power of His Word.

And so, that means as the Good Shepherd knows all of His sheep.

The Good Shepherd knows you and me. He knows who all of us are, and He knows us inside out.

Imagine for a second that you got arrested (*which would never happen, right?*), but you got arrested, and taken into custody. They stood you up in a police line up with maybe ten, or even twenty other people. You are staring at that two way mirror, and they tell you to turn, and everything else.

Jesus is the One behind that two way mirror having to identify who you are. What are the chances of Jesus being able to pick out who you are? One hundred percent. He would not even have to think about it. He would know who you are in a heartbeat. He would be able to pick you out from everyone else in the whole wide world. That is how well He knows you. He knows every single thought that rolls around inside your head, even the ones you try to bury. He knows every word you have ever spoken in your life, even the ones you wish you could take back. He knows how you spend your money, and what it says about your true desires. He knows your browser history, and what you spend time looking for on the internet. Jesus knows each of us inside and out. He knows you, and He knows me.

To Him, our lives are completely an 'open book'. That is kind of scary to think about isn't it, at first, until you hear about what Jesus does as the One who knows us, the Good Shepherd who knows us. He says,

**“I know my sheep...”**

**“I am the Good Shepherd.**

**I know my sheep and my sheep know Me...”**

**“And I lay down my life for the sheep.”**

You see, it is because Jesus knows us inside and out that He is willing to do that for us. He knows how broken and messed up we are, because of sin. He knows we are like sheep without a shepherd. He knows that 'old wolf', the devil is looking to devour us for all

eternity. Knowing all of that, Jesus lays down His life for us. He offers up His life, His holy life to rescue us once and for all. Because Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, does that for you and for me, because He lays down His life for us, you and me, as His sheep, now know who are Good Shepherd is. That is what Jesus is talking about when He says,

**“I know my sheep and my sheep know me...”**

We recognize the Good Shepherd precisely because of what He does for us, because the Good Shepherd knows us, and lays down His life for us. When we see Jesus suffering, and dying on the cross, we don't have to wonder what God thinks about us. We are seeing the very heart of Christ. In the end, Jesus knows us, and lays down His life for us because He loves us. That is really what sets Jesus apart from every other shepherd out there. The Good Shepherd knows His sheep, ultimately, because the Good Shepherd loves His sheep. We see that love in Jesus' willing self sacrifice for us.

Right away in the first verse of our reading Jesus said,

**“I am the Good Shepherd.**

**The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.”**

The Good Shepherd sacrifices Himself for the good of His sheep. Jesus talks about His willingness to make this sacrifice for us. He says,

**“...I lay down my life so that I may take it up again.**

**No one takes it from me,**

**but I lay it down on my own.**

**I have authority to lay it down,**

**and I have authority to take it up again.”**

He says that not only reflects His own love, but also the Father's love, too. He said,

**“This is why the Father loves me,**

**because I lay down my life**

**so that I may take it up again.”**

Because Jesus died on Good Friday, and then rose again on Easter Sunday, we know that not only does Jesus love us and care for us, but that God the Father loves us, too. That is what makes Jesus different from every false god out there. That is what makes Jesus different from every false religious leader in the world today.

Jesus goes on to say,

**“The hired man, who is not a shepherd, does not own the sheep.**

**He sees the wolf coming, leaves the sheep, and runs away.**

**Then the wolf attacks the sheep and scatters them.**

**Because he works for money, he does not care about the sheep.”**

I am sure at one time or another we all have had the experience of being cared for by someone who really did not care. You remember going to the DMV to renew your driver's license. You know immediately, when they call your number, and you go up to the counter, whether that person who is helping you cares, or not, don't you?

That is the situation Jesus was addressing here in John, chapter ten. Jesus was not talking to His disciples here. Jesus was talking to a bunch of Pharisees about what it meant for Him to be the Good Shepherd. He was talking to these Pharisees because they were supposed to be the shepherds for God's people. They were supposed to be the shepherds for God's sheep, the spiritual leaders who were supposed to love and care for the Children of Israel, who were supposed to teach them The Word of God so they would be ready when the Messiah came. They were supposed to love the Children of God, but they didn't. They didn't care.

Jesus, in the chapter just before this one had done a really fantastic miracle. He had healed a man who was born blind, but He did it on the Sabbath. So, the Pharisees hauled this man in front of them, and put him on trial, basically. They interrogated him, and his parents. Then, when the answers he gave did not satisfy them, instead of caring for this man, instead of being thankful for this great miracle

that was done so that he was now able to see, they tossed him out of the synagogue. They basically threw him out on to the street. Here Jesus was calling them to repentance, calling them to recognize their failure as God's shepherds, to recognize the lack of love that was in their own hearts, to see their selfishness, and their desire to preserve their own reputation, to preserve their own power, rather than to love one of God's people. He wanted them to put their hope not in themselves, and their own righteousness, but in Him. We know what it is to not be cared for. But, we also know what it is like to be uncaring. The moments when we could have cared for somebody, when we could have helped somebody, when we could have shown love to somebody, but it would have involved laying down our lives in some way, shape, manner, or form. Maybe not dying, but to lay down our own busy lives, to lay down our busy schedule, to lay down our pride, to lay down our own self-righteous attitude toward somebody who maybe sinned against us. These are verses we pastors take to heart. We know the times in our own lives, too, when we have acted more like a hired hand. In the end, that is what we all are.

We are not the shepherds.

We are sheep.

We are sheep who need rescuing.

That is why Jesus is our Good Shepherd, who loves us, and cares for us, as His sheep, so much so that He lays down His life for us. Not because we are any good, but because we are His sheep. He says,

**“I know my sheep.”**

**“I also have other sheep...”**

We belong to Him. Jesus chose us as His own, before the creation of the world. In that eternal love, our Good Shepherd became the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. Our Good Shepherd put Himself between us and that old wolf, Satan, and laid down His life, sacrificing Himself so that we could spend eternity

with Him.

As His sheep, as His followers, that is the love and care we strive for each, and every day. That love and care means so much to others. We know how it feels to be cared for, don't we?

This past Maundy Thursday was a bit of a hard one in our house, because that afternoon my wife and son had to take our dog to the vet, and say good bye. It is always a sad day when that happens even though you tell yourself, "*It is just a dog.*" But, that dog becomes almost part of the family to a certain extent, and you are sad about it, when it happens.

A week later something interesting happened. We got a card in the mail, a pink envelop, from the vet's office. We opened the envelope, and inside was a sympathy card. But, it was not just a generic sympathy card with the name of the vet's business on the bottom. It was hand signed by every single person who worked in that office! Inside that sympathy card were five other, little, cards. Four of them were Hershey's paw prints. The fifth was her nose print.

You think to yourself, "*Well, they probably do this for every single one of their clients who loses a dog.*" But at the same time in that moment, Charity and I felt really cared for.

And yet, how much greater, how much greater is the love and care of our Good Shepherd, who cares for us not just as one moment, but who loves and cares for us every moment of every day, who leads us beside the still waters, to make us lie down in green pastures, who calms our fears, as He walks us through the valley of the shadow of death. How much greater is the love of our Good Shepherd who comforts us with the rod and staff of His Word, who feeds us with His own body and blood, who lays down His life for us, and then takes it back up again, so that we may dwell with Him in the House of the Lord now, and forever.

Amen



Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,  
guard your heart and mind, through Christ Jesus.

Amen