

John 10:11-21

“The Good Shepherd”

April 26, 2020

Today we’re talking about The Good Shepherd. As it pertains to Jesus, He is the Good Shepherd... the greatest shepherd of all. He is our good Shepherd... we are the sheep of his pasture.

Sheep need fresh pasture and water daily and in the deserts of Palestine that can be no easy task. A shepherd will search for water sometimes for hours every day. He carries a pail with him that he will fill over and over again for any sheep who cannot access the water. A shepherd will lead his flock to water he will lead them to good pastures. He will protect them, watch out for them, guard them, tend to their wounds, care for them, brings back strays, and seeks out the lost. A shepherd carries a rod and a six foot staff. A shepherd will sometimes throw his rod at a sheep who is wandering and refuses to heed the shepherd’s voice. This is a discipline that can hurt the sheep but is done out of love to protect it. Other times instead of the rod a shepherd will nudge gently the stray to bring it back to the flock. Both the rod and the staff are protection for the sheep. The life of a shepherd is not an easy one, but it is vital for the life of the sheep. Without the shepherd the sheep have little hope for survival. They will wander aimlessly searching for water but likely will not find it. They will be harassed and killed by wild beasts. Sheep need a shepherd.

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3 The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice.

⁷ Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep.

¹¹ “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³ The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

¹⁴ “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one

shepherd. ¹⁷ The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”

¹⁹ The Jews who heard these words were again divided. ²⁰ Many of them said, “He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?”

²¹ But others said, “These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”

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Jesus is The Good Shepherd. He set the gold standard of what it meant to be a Good Shepherd. As we come to know him, he asks that we embody the traits of being a good shepherd as well. A good shepherd takes time to listen to people, protects their sheep, and is willing to sacrifice themselves for their sheep.

Taking time to listen

A good shepherd takes time to listen to people. They learn as many of their names as possible, and takes a keen interest in their everyday activities.

When I was little, I was thrilled when Brother Charlie Culbreth was the minister of the Cairo Church. I never forgot the fact that he cared about the people in his flock. Each Sunday, brother Charlie would have a green wicker basket full of candy for the kids to flock to after the closing hymn. He always had time for children (and for that matter everyone else). Brother Charlie would put his hand out and say, “Give me five!” Even at such a young age, that may have done more to motivate me into ministry than the scores of sermons I heard from him. In later years, Charlie retired in Cairo and was among the people that my family counted as the best of friends. Charlie was a very gifted preacher, but he always took time to listen to people.

You can take time to listen this week. It doesn't have to take forever. And it will mean the world to someone else. Perhaps you may even listen to the message that God wants to convey to you as well! Through the years, I've been on many missions work teams throughout the western hemisphere. Christian organizations such as Appalachian Service Project and the United Methodist Volunteers in Mission train volunteers to listen to the person with whom they are working. I

remember a story about a man who had a volunteer team come over after a bad storm. The home was damaged and the work team quickly started working on the house. One volunteer just sat down with the man on his front porch. A short time later, the volunteer came running around the house to the other work team members and said, “Quick, stop what you’re doing?!” They asked in a somewhat frustrated manner, “Why?!” The volunteer who had been speaking with the man said, “Do you see that lawn tractor under that collapsed shed? He can’t work until his tractor is freed from the shed.” The work team stopped what they were doing and went over to the shed. With tears in his eyes, the man thanked the volunteers. Now the man was ready to hear what the volunteers had to say about faith. That volunteer inspired the man to come to Jesus simply by listening to what the man had to say.

Psalm 23 (KJV) says (and if you know it, say it with me... it’s one of the only passages I learned in the KJV)

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

² He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

³ He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴ Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

⁵ Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

It is such a popular passage because it speaks core truths of the faith. The Lord is the Good Shepherd. He leads his sheep as each one has immense value to him. Just as each sheep has immense value to the shepherd, we have immense value to Jesus. In Luke 15:4-6, Jesus told them this parable: ⁴“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? ⁵ And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶ and goes home.

Offering protection

This leads us to our second point. A good shepherd protects his sheep. Jesus said in John 10:7, “I am the gate for the sheep” (John 10:7). He spoke in a vernacular common to that time. A good shepherd led the flock into a protected enclosure and

then slept in the opening of the sheepfold. He became the gate and personally blocked the entryway. Any wild animal seeking to harm the sheep could only enter through the gate guarded by the shepherd.

Jesus offered a stark contrast to the good shepherd in John 10:12-13: “The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep”

Perhaps you’ve experienced the pain of finding a hired hand in your own life or more painful yet, maybe you’ve looked back at an experience you’ve had and realized you might have been the hired hand. I believe that the hired hand represents the constant battle that we all fight between the flesh and the Holy Spirit... the things of this earth and the things are God.

The hired hand may disguise themselves as someone who cares for us only to be absent when we need them the most. Think of Peter’s denial of Jesus. Peter Luke 22:61-62 (NIV) says, “And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.”⁶² And he went out and wept bitterly.”

Hired hands may cause us to experience the pain of betrayal. Once someone betrays us, it sticks with us, doesn’t it?!” Think Judas. Luke 22:4-6 says, “⁴ And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus. ⁵ They were delighted and agreed to give him money. ⁶ He consented, and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present.” I believe that what probably hurt Jesus the most was not that Judas betrayed him, but that it was so premeditated. He plans it with those who were most against Jesus. It truly was an inside job. And that most likely is why in hindsight, Judas couldn’t forgive himself.

Perhaps you’ve experienced the pain of enduring suffering and are asking yourself “When is this every going to end?” The hired hand may be the object of our anguish. A lot of the Scriptures are about lamenting the situations in which we find ourselves. Psalm 35: 17-19 says,

“How long, Lord, will you look on?

Rescue me from their ravages,
my precious life from these lions.

¹⁸ I will give you thanks in the great assembly;

among the throngs I will praise you.
19 Do not let those gloat over me
who are my enemies without cause;
do not let those who hate me without reason
maliciously wink the eye.

In all of these scenarios and more, people cry out for God's protection. What did Jesus cry out to God in his final prayer time before the events were set into motion that brought about His death on the cross? In Luke 22:42 he says, "'Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.'" In other words, "Lord, help me! Protect me! But if I must suffer, let your name be glorified as a result of my suffering!"

God is the faithful protector of his sheep and that's why the Lamb which is Jesus had to be slain... so that you and I don't get what we deserve. We receive the fruits of the Spirit as it says in Galatians 5:22... God's love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

As Billy Graham once said, "God may not remove the storms of life, but he will give us peace in the midst of them.

Always remember that the Good Shepherd controls the gate and sleeps in the entryway. That's what Jesus does for us as the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd protects his sheep.

Sacrificial actions

Most importantly, a good shepherd loves his sheep and is willing to sacrifice for them. As John 10:11 puts it, "The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." Christ demonstrated His love for us by dying for us while we were still sinners. Others recognize that the good shepherd genuinely cares for them and puts their interest ahead of his own.

In John 15:13, Jesus says, "13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." As the Good Shepherd, Jesus laid down his life for us and now he wants us to sacrificially lay down our lives for others so that they can know this Jesus that we've already found.

Laying down our lives cannot be done half way. Either our life is laid down or not. Laying down our life requires a death to self so that Christ's light may shine through us. It requires conscious and willing sacrifice and selflessness.

We lay down our lives for others in many ways every day. Some small, some big. But most importantly, laying down our lives means that we give of ourselves to make sure that the Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ is ever expanding here on this earth. Thy Kingdom Come... Thy Will be Done on Earth as it is in Heaven. Not my will... but Thy Will.

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You may have heard me give this example before, but I love the true story about shepherds in Israel who are willing to risk their own feet in order to save their sheep. When a sheep gets lost, the shepherd goes off the beaten path to find the sheep. Once found, the shepherd puts the sheep over their back and takes them to safety. That's why in the Parable of the Lost Sheep, the shepherd picks the sheep up and puts it around his neck to take it back home.

Today, there are a number of lessons we can learn. The most important I believe is that the Good Shepherd stands ready to lead us through the continual trials we face.

Right now, one of our trials is stir craziness!

We should stay under the care and guidance of the Good Shepherd and he will see us through. Purple Cards.

Second, we can be the Good Shepherd to other people.

Bishop Bryan, the Bishop in South Georgia, was talking just this past week about Wesley's three rules for Christian living. They are Do No Harm. Do Good. Attend Upon Ordinances of God.

At Dublin First Methodist, we are excited to see you again in on-site worship. We're going to be working really hard in the coming weeks to be ready for when that day does come. But, we also recognize that this is a new day and age as with corona there is no current vaccine or treatment.

What could that mean for our church as we seek to protect the flock?

I believe that it means a number of things:

First, online worship is here to stay. We'll still be coming to you on Facebook and YouTube each week. Some people may be slow to come back to church, and we want to be ready for that.

Secondly, I will be working hard with a team of key leaders to prepare the church building for your arrival. That includes things like deep cleaning, thinking about space issues, having masks and wipes available, and allowing for those who are most vulnerable to covid 19 to still be able to come to worship without concern for their safety.

I tell you this so that you can begin to prepare your hearts and minds for being a part of your faith community again with lessened concern for your safety. I have a feeling that things will be done a little bit differently when you return. As a start, we all will have to wear our most fashionable face masks and still social distance. We'll keep you in the loop about what's coming up as we get closer to opening the building yet again. Please pray for God to give us all an openness to the necessary changes as we prepare to return.

We will not be back to in person worship until at least May 17, based on recommendations and requirements, maybe even later. In the meantime, continue to watch online. We've got worship, Sunday School, devotionals, and more coming to you each week. It points you to the Good Shepherd as those within our church and on staff seek to be Good Shepherds of the flock. Everything we do is to point you to Jesus, so that you can know Jesus and share Jesus.

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And now it is time for us to say thank you! Thank you to those on the very front lines of covid 19. We thank Post office workers, restaurant worker, grocery store clerks, School teachers, elected officials, those keeping our internet running, newscasters, truck drivers, warehouse workers, sanitation workers, those keeping our lights on, bankers, and so many more! I am praying for you daily and I encourage all of my counterparts in Christ who are watching today's service to continue to pray for you as well.

A reminder as we mentioned earlier that Matt Sweat and the Crosswalk Class are still coordinating with the Sheriff's Department to offer groceries and pharmacy runs to the most vulnerable right now. The City of Dublin is doing the same.

There is no shame in taking part in this opportunity. Stay in, and allow someone to help you if needed. Again, Matt's cell is 4782790196. We pray for those who are experiencing spousal and child abuse. There are resources available to help you. The GA Coalition against domestic violence's # is 800-334-2836. Last week, I mentioned that there is an uptick in suicide. The suicide prevention line is 800-273-8255. Also, let's keep a close check on those who are alone right now. Friends, check on your neighbors and especially those who live alone. Just ask them, "How are you doing?" and listen to what they say. You may find a new found friend! Whether or not these situations fit your circumstances, call or text me and tell me how you're doing and how I can pray for you. 912-585-7247.

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Jesus is the Good Shepherd... the greatest shepherd of all. Now he wants us to be the Good Shepherd to others as we show others to Him.