

*“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.*

*<sup>14</sup> “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—<sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. <sup>18</sup> 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.” (John 10:11-18)*

### **A Shepherd like No Other**

It’s a familiar picture to many people. You may have one in your own house. If not, you’ve probably seen it in another home or church. With a content smile on his face Jesus is standing there with the shepherd’s crook in one hand and a baby lamb nestled in his other hand while a flock of sheep swarm around his feet. It’s the Good Shepherd, Jesus. If you don’t know it from the picture, you recognize the picture from Psalm 23. Even people who have little-to-no connection to a church know or have heard Psalm 23. “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want...” It’s comforting. It’s peaceful. It encourages. It’s gentle. It’s held near and dear to our hearts. So when we hear Jesus say in John 10, “I am the Good Shepherd,” I think it would be safe to assume you are thinking he spoke those words in a similar way. Comforting. Encouraging. Peaceful. Gentle.

Before we get to those words, we need to understand what led Jesus to speak them. It should have been a time of celebration. From the first time a certain man took a breath in this world and opened his eyes all he saw was darkness. Blind from birth with every day to follow with more darkness. Then one day a man comes along, spits on the ground, makes some mud and, applying it to his eyes, says: “Go, wash.” Trusting, he does, and he goes home seeing. No one could believe it. They were sure it was a different man. How can a blind man see? There should have been rejoicing!

But the religious leaders didn’t like it. Instead of rejoicing, they drag the now-seeing man in to question him. When he doesn’t give them the answers they were looking for, the leaders in charge of the religious life of the people—the Pharisees—throw him out of the synagogue. These religious leaders were supposed

to be taking care of the sheep of Israel—God’s people. Their job was to lead the people and their lives to the Lord and to prepare them for the Messiah. They were supposed to be shepherds protecting the people from the many spiritual attacks that come in this world. They thought they were doing a good job too.

Instead, they harassed the people burdening consciences with more laws and commands. They set themselves up as models to emulate and to follow. Their reputations and needing to look good on the outside was, therefore, of utmost importance. If someone could not live up to such standards, the impression was and they assured that your connection to Abraham as a Jew could save you. Instead of pointing them to Jesus who was the Messiah, they threatened to kick anyone out of the synagogue who acknowledged it. When the wolves of this world came attacking, they showed themselves for who they really were. They were more concerned about themselves. They didn’t really love the sheep. They were in it for their reputations, lining their own pockets, for those perks that came along with it. They liked to hear how good they were. The respect was pretty nice too.

“Hired hands,” Jesus calls the Pharisees. When Jesus speaks these words in John 10 it’s not a gentle, encouraging, peaceful Jesus. He’s getting after and calling out the religious leaders. He sees what they are doing and is upset. How can they continue to do this to his flock?

Hired hands! It’s a fine profession and good way to support your family. But here in John 10, hired hand is not a compliment. The leaders weren’t doing what they were supposed to do. Instead of protecting the sheep, they were leading them astray. Instead of doing the most important job, they are selfish, self-serving, watching out for themselves.

Focus on reputation and what other people see. Work so hard to maintain appearances. Get caught up trying to keep up with those around you and the experiences they get to have. Serving because you know it’s going to impress someone or make someone happy. Rely on a name and belonging to a certain group—like a church, Lutheran... Emphasis on title and the respect, power, perks that come along with it. More focused on outward action than what’s at the heart. Keeping someone from being with the Shepherd and hearing his voice. Giving the impression that anything is on the same level of importance as hearing the voice of the Shepherd. Not saying what needs to be said but wanting to keep the peace. That’s me! That’s you! Selfish, self-serving, looking out for yourself and what’s in it for you. We do not love as we should. **“HIRED HANDS!”**

“I am the Good Shepherd,” Jesus says. Look for a fault with him, you won’t find it. He is the Good Shepherd. He does exactly what needs to be done for his sheep.

He's the shepherd whose work is never late but arrives precisely when he means to. He calls out the leaders of Israel, he calls you and me to repentance—we have failed to love the sheep, the people, as we should!

**“I am the Good Shepherd, I know my sheep and my sheep know me.”** The Good Shepherd knows his sheep. He has a close, personal intimate relationship with his own. He loves his sheep; Jesus loves His people. That's what pains him when he sees what the hired hands do. They are leaving his people defenseless and abandoning those he loves. He sees how the wolves scatter the sheep and savage them. The wolves of the world come in and drag the sheep away with promises of a better life outside of a relationship with Jesus. The sheep who love to wander are tempted by the wolves of sin with assurances that everyone sins and you should be able to choose your own truth for yourself. There's the ferocious wolf the devil who is always prowling and seeking to devour.

Jesus sees all of this and says, **“I am the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep.”** Nothing less could save you. Nothing less would protect you. No one takes Jesus' life from him. He sets it down. He gives it up. The physical and mental torture of the cross would not steal Jesus' life from him. When his Father forsakes Jesus to suffer the agonies of hell and sin on his own, Jesus isn't forced into submission by death. Only when Jesus is good and ready and the work to save you is done will he cry out: “It is finished!” Only then will Jesus rest his soul in his Father's hands, bow his head, and give up his life. No one but he has the authority to set it down. “Over my dead body, will I let sin, Satan and this world take my sheep,” Jesus says.

But anyone can die. In fact, unless Jesus returns first, we all will die. But the reason the Father loves Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is because Jesus lays down his life—only to take it up again. On Easter morning, the tomb is empty. Jesus lives. And because our Good Shepherd lives, we know that we too will live. Our life here is not the end. He will lead you, his sheep, through this dark valley of death. But you need not fear any evil. **“See what great love the Father pours out on you that we should be called children of God!”** (1 John 3:1). And that is what you are. You are God's dear child, baptized into his name, part of God's family. Your shepherd protects you with his rod and staff. He is your Lord who blesses and keeps you from so many dangers that you never realize. And even the ones you do face, the very real struggles you deal with, and the frustrations drive you to despair, Jesus is your Good Shepherd so that you are not lacking what you need to get through it. He promises, “My grace is sufficient for you.” He's with you, here, today. He'll still be with you tomorrow. And he has no plans of every leaving you. He prepares a table for you in the Lord's Supper with his body and blood given

and poured out for you with the bread and wine for the forgiveness of your sins. He leads you beside the quiet waters of his Word to refresh your aching soul. You hear his voice and know he is the Good Shepherd because you are his sheep. You know him and he knows you.

The thing is, he's not done with you. Remember, there are still other sheep that he wants in this one flock. There are still many out there who have not heard Jesus' voice, who have not heard the good news of a Good Shepherd who saves us from this world filled with false hopes and empty dreams and eternal suffering and despair. So he brings us in, not to be hired hands, but to work along-side him. The Good Shepherd speaks with your mouth and works with your hands to bring the sheep to him and Jesus promises, **"They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd."**

There are many in the world who have not heard Jesus' voice. There are many in our country. There are so many in our community who have not heard or who have and wandered away. They need to hear Jesus' voice. So speak it. Share God's Word and leave the rest of the work up to the Good Shepherd. Jesus knows the sheep far more closely and intimately than we can even begin to imagine. He knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows how to bring them in. Speak the Word and let him do the rest of the work.

That's why we have a church. That's why we have this school and preschool. Yes, we strive to give excellent education to our students. Yes, we desire to equip them to be upstanding people of society. Above all we want them to hear the Shepherd's voice. We work so they know who Jesus is: the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for them, his sheep, to pick it back up again so they might be with Jesus forever. That's why we gather offerings. Trusting that the Good Shepherd will provide for our needs so we lack nothing, we willingly give our first fruits to support this work so that we might share Jesus' voice with more people.

"I am the Good Shepherd," Jesus says. Get out there and share his voice. Bring your children to hear his voice. Invite your neighbors and family members. Encourage the person you meet on the street. Jesus doesn't ask you to lay down your life for his sheep; he already has. He doesn't ask you to go above and beyond, he already did. You don't have to be the Good Shepherd, they already have a shepherd like no other in Jesus. Amen.