

## 1 Good Shepherd – John 10:11-16; 1 Peter 2:21-25

There are two things I would like for us to consider this morning. The first is this: We need a good Shepherd. The second is this: Jesus is our good Shepherd.

We need a good Shepherd, because we are sheep. The prophet Isaiah says, “We all like sheep have gone astray.” This is what sheep are prone to do. And if one sheep wanders, then the rest will follow.

Now, you might think that you are very independently minded. You think for yourself, right? But you are only underestimating how impressionable you are. No one is truly that independent. We all breathe in some kind of air. We are all susceptible to the trends in the culture. And when one sheep follows the ways of the world, then other sheep begin to wander as well.

Christians are often led astray by the winds of worldly doctrine. It’s not uncommon for Christians to change their tune about fornication, shacking up, and other kinds of sexual immorality when they find that their children or their friends are engaged in this behavior. It’s not uncommon for followers of Christ to use their Lord’s name in vain, laugh with those who mock God’s truth, or tear down someone’s reputation. And it’s especially common for Christians to look for religious guidance from a political movement. Or they follow someone who makes them feel good about themselves while putting a Christian spin on it. You might convince yourself that it doesn’t matter, as long as we are all Christians and as long as we all get along. But that is a sheepish way of thinking, and it only proves all the more how much we need a good Shepherd.

We need a good shepherd, because there are other imposters who claim to represent the good Shepherd, but the words they preach are full of deceit. They don’t feed the sheep with what the Shepherd gives. Instead, they water down God’s Word while adding their own worldly doctrines. They don’t care about the sheep. They work only to feed their own bellies. So Jesus calls them hired hands.

For many years, there have been false teachers who are popular on television. Now add social media to that mix, and it seems there is one for everyone. You don’t have to search very far, whether on the internet or in your own neighborhood, to find someone who directs you to your own merits and human wisdom while sprinkling it with a little bit of gospely sounding language.

I once listened to a sermon from a Missouri Synod pastor who went on and on talking about how you need to have compassion on yourself, but after ten minutes I heard nothing about Christ, nothing of the atonement, nothing about sin, nothing about God’s wrath against sin, no warnings about the devil and the spiritual dangers against your faith, not even a single reference to Scripture. All I heard was psychological fluff about self-worth and self-

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compassion, much more fitting for an episode of Dr. Phil than for a pulpit of Christ's church. It's possible that he eventually got around to plugging in some message about Jesus near the end. I quit listening after ten minutes, because that should be enough time to determine what the focus of someone's preaching is.

About a decade ago, I heard a sermon from another Missouri Synod pastor explaining that every time the Bible condemned homosexuality it was just condemning cultic practices in pagan temples, not the act of homosexuality itself. I've heard people do the same thing with the Bible's prohibition of women preaching publicly in the church. Bring in some backstory, which may or may not be true or relevant, say that the Apostle is actually prohibiting some local pagan practice at that time, and then conclude that what he says in the text doesn't really apply to us anymore. They manage to make the passages of Scripture say the opposite of what they say. Thankfully that man is no longer in the Missouri Synod.

But these winds of doctrine are everywhere. They always point you to something that distracts from what the Bible is clearly teaching. The Bible says that Christ has given his keys to the church (Matt 18:17-20). A hired hand says that the church is actually a council of bishops, not the sheep who hear their Shepherd's voice. The Bible clearly teaches that we are declared righteous before God through faith apart from works of the law (Rom 3:28). A hired hand comes in and says that the Apostle was only talking about certain works required in the Old Testament or works done without God's help, so they conclude that we are saved by a combination of faith and works. They dilute and confuse the teachings of God's Word and then gaslight you into believing that you don't actually understand God's clear words. They deceive and mislead lambs whom Jesus loves.

The hired hand sees the wolf coming, and then he runs. He sees the false doctrine mixing into what he is giving to the sheep. But he doesn't care. He cares nothing for the sheep, because he just wants to get paid. Or else he just wants the followers. He wants numbers, clicks, and attention. When the wolf comes, when Satan accuses you and seeks to devour you, the hired hand just leaves you to your own devices. He wasn't there to feed you with the words of eternal life. Even though he may have given you a good show and made himself out to be quite the Bible scholar, he was never there to teach you to repent of your sins, look to the blood atonement of Christ, and thereby gain strength to bear your cross in this dying world. No, he's there to make you feel good about yourself, rely on your own religious exercises, and give you a sense of belonging. But once it's no longer convenient for him, he's gone. You're on your own to seek peace for your conscience.

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No matter how well-read you are in your doctrine, you are still prone to wander. Even a guy who has studied theology formally and informally for several years is not immune to following these deceitful doctrines.

And why is this? It's because we naturally think about ourselves and where we stand in this world. We naturally think about our own lives and our own wellbeing in this life. It's a survival tactic. This is why we naturally follow those who point us to ourselves and make us feel comfortable about what we already think and do. God has made us social creatures. It is not good for man to be alone. He therefore intends for us to move around in a flock, to walk with other people. But the problem is that we so easily follow the crowd onto the broad way that leads to destruction. Our sinful nature has corrupted our natural desire for community. This causes us to seek fellowship with whatever this popular age is promoting. We naturally want to fit in, because our instincts tell us that this is the best way to survive.

But our Shepherd tells us that we must lose our lives in this world. We must deny ourselves. We must not depend on any of our own reason or strength, our own intelligence and pride, or our own emotions and earthly comforts. No one else would tell us this truth. But Jesus tells us the truth. Jesus knows that we need a good Shepherd. And he is that good Shepherd.

Jesus is our good Shepherd, because he gives his life up for the sheep. He knows us. He knows our every need. He knows that you want certainty. He knows that you want to belong, that you don't want to be condemned, or abused, or lost in the dark. But he doesn't flatter you. He doesn't tell you that you're just fine. He doesn't explain away hard truths. He doesn't point you to your own religious exercises, your own emotions, your own understanding, or whatever is popular to believe and do. He calls us to repentance, to deny ourselves, to lose our lives in this world. He is honest with us. Whether these are the popular sins of this age, or they are simply our lustful desires, our anger, and our pride, Jesus knows what is in us. But he did not run away from us when he saw such wickedness overtaking us. No, he laid his life down for us. We all like sheep have gone astray. Each of us has followed his or her own way. But the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Jesus says that the Father knows him and he knows the Father. He has known the Father from eternity. He has always sought to do his Father's will. In the Father and the Son there is perfect fellowship, perfect communion, and perfect, divine love with the same Holy Spirit. It is with this same knowledge and love of his Father that Jesus gave his life up for his sheep. He therefore knows us just as intimately as he knows his Father. And his Father loves us with the same love by which he loves the Son. No one can snatch us out of his hands. Because if he did not spare even his own Son whom he loves and knows from eternity, then certainly he will with him give to us all good things.

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Our good Shepherd will therefore not mislead us or disappoint us. What he says often sounds hard to our human reason. He tells us to bear our cross, to lose our lives in this world, to turn the other cheek when we are slapped, to bless those who curse us, and be willing to be defrauded and condemned in this dying world. But we don't need some hired hands to explain to us that Jesus didn't really mean what he said. Instead, we simply need faith in our Savior. He commended his life to his Father who judges justly. His Word gives us the faith to do the same.

When we follow our Shepherd, walking in his example, we are not only learning how to think, talk, and walk like Christians. We are not only learning love, kindness, patience, humility, and self-control. This isn't just a lesson in virtues and moral living. Much more. When we follow Christ, we learn again and again what he did for us. He suffered for us. He bore our sins in his own body on the tree so that we may die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you are healed. Even when your Savior's footsteps take you through the clouds and temptations and trials of this life, especially when you learn along the way just how weak and sinful and foolish you are, how little you knew and how arrogant you were to think you knew so much, he remains kind and patient with you. Because when you follow in your Shepherd's steps, he is always bringing you back to this truth. He died for you. He laid his life down for you. He took all your sin and foolishness on himself, and in exchange he gives you his own righteousness.

So don't be afraid to admit that you need a good Shepherd. Don't be afraid to learn the Scriptures. There is much that seems hard to understand, but you don't need some hired hand to explain it to you with some kind of secret insight. God has spoken and revealed his will for you. The Bible interprets itself. And no matter what God's Word is teaching, no matter what kinds of idols in your heart or in this world God's Word is smashing, all the Scriptures are constantly pointing you to Christ in whom there is forgiveness, eternal life, and salvation. This is the confession that the whole flock of Christ depends on.

We therefore don't need to be discouraged by all the disunity and factions we see in the church on earth. The crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ remains the true Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. He remains the head of the whole church. He will not let his sheep be dragged into the errors of this world. He will continue to call and gather us with his Word. And there will be one flock and one Shepherd. Amen.