

SERMON NOTES
John 10:10-18
“I Am the Good Shepherd”

Intro:

- *Who in your life have you been able to trust to provide, guide and protect you?*
- *A father or mother / a grandparent / a coach / a teacher / a mentor*
- *You may not have thought of that person in these terms, but that person was a shepherd for you*
- *That’s what shepherds do: they provide, guide and protect*
- *That’s what Jesus will do for you if you follow Him*

I. “I AM the GOOD Shepherd” implies there are bad shepherds

- *Indeed there are bad shepherds – in biblical times and today*
- *During the beginning of the Babylonian exile after the fall of Jerusalem and Judah, the prophet Ezekiel prophesied judgment against Israel’s and Judah’s Shepherds – the political and religious leaders of Israel who misused their power for their own gain while failing to provide for, guide and protect God’s People*

Ezekiel 34:8-10 Because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep, therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: Thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them.

- What would God then do for His People?

Ezekiel 34:15-16 I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice.

- The LORD God -- Yahweh Himself would be the shepherd of his sheep
- *He Himself would feed them and protect them and bring them under His care to provide pasture for them and make them secure*

- That is the biblical context for Jesus' declaration: I AM the GOOD Shepherd
- Yes, THAT Shepherd – the Shepherd promised in Ezekiel 34
- Yahweh – the Great I AM – come in human flesh to give eternal life to those who listen to His voice and follow Him
- But notice that throughout John 10, Jesus is contrasting Himself as the Good Shepherd with others who would neglect or harm or fail to protect and care for the sheep

John 10:1 “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber.”

John 10:5 “A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.”

John 10:8 “All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them.”

John 10:12-13 “He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.”

- And most clearly the contrast is seen in John 10:10

John 10:10 “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”

- The Thief, of course, is Satan and those evil spirits – or human spiritual leaders -- who do his bidding
- *Today as well, there are Bad shepherds and strange voices who are leading people astray*
- Some of these shepherds are pastors and teachers who are promoting an agenda that is contrary to biblical truth
- *Some strange voices can be heard on TikTok or YouTube or podcasts or Face Book or mainstream media or university classrooms or today even in some elementary school classrooms*

- The most prominent and pervasive and influential agenda being shouted out proudly with the loudest voices in our society today is the LGBTQ agenda and the abortion agenda – which are related – both having their origin in the rebellious sexual revolution of the 1960s & 70s
- *And some of these strange voices – voices that have never been heard before in 2000 years of church history – now have been welcomed into some Christian churches*
- Some churches are now including in their liturgy a collection of LGBTQ-affirming hymns -- "Songs for the Holy Other" -- hymns by and for those who identify as “members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, transgender, nonbinary, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, aromantic, two-spirit, and other sexual/gender minority (LGBTQIA2S+) community and their allies.”
- *“All Colors of the Rainbow” / “The Heart Will Choose the One It Loves” / “Queerly Beloved” / “God Calls You Good” / “God of Queer Transgressive Spaces” / “Quirky, Queer and Wonderful” / “The Kingdom of God Is the Queerest of Nations”*
- If I could summarize the gist of these hymns: *God loves and accepts everyone just as they are – and there is no need to change or repent – rather all sexual behaviors and relationships and gender identities are to be affirmed as pleasing to God*
- Does God love LGBTQ individuals? Of course He does
- *Does God require repentance of everyone who enters the kingdom of God – regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity?*
- Yes – we all have sinned / we all need forgiveness and cleansing through the blood of Christ / *and we all need to humble ourselves and repent and submit to God’s will and live in obedience to God’s Word*
- Sinful behaviors that are contrary to God’s Word are NOT to be affirmed – *they are to be exchanged for the freedom and wholeness and abundant life that come from living under the Lordship of Jesus Christ*
- Lest you think that these strange voices are being heard only in liberal, progressive churches:
- One in five evangelicals believes gender identity is a matter of choice.
- *More than 50 percent of Christians of all denominations think casual sex is sometimes or always acceptable.*

- In 1996, 27 percent of the public supported legalizing same-sex unions. In 2022, the number rose to 72 percent.
- *While only 34% of white evangelicals age 50 and over favor same-sex marriage, 51% of younger white evangelicals ages 18-49 now favor it*
- That is a major reason why many younger adults are leaving the church
- *The problem for true followers of Jesus is that the Bible hasn't changed, which means that God is still against homosexual practice, same-sex marriage and multiple gender identities.*
- The words of Jesus are clear:
 - Matthew 19:4-6 He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."
- And so, if we want to be in solidarity with the Lord, we will find ourselves at odds with the prevailing culture.
- LGBTQ individuals are not the enemy – they are people who need God's love and ours

- *But there are indeed shepherds today who are leading people astray – encouraging and affirming practices and lifestyles clearly contrary to the Scriptures and contrary to 2000 years of Christian teaching*
- *In nearly every age and society, following Jesus has always meant swimming upstream against cultural currents*
- Heeding the voice of the Good Shepherd has always required discernment and the courage to reject many of the prevailing voices in society
- *Today especially following Jesus requires us to reject the strange voices of false shepherds and to recognize and listen to the Voice of the Good Shepherd*
- Characteristics of the Good Shepherd:

II. THE GOOD SHEPHERD KNOWS HIS SHEEP, AND HIS SHEEP KNOW HIS VOICE

John 10:3-4 The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.

John 10:14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,

John 10:27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

- From time to time I am asked to give counsel or advice to someone I don't know very well – or about a relationship or situation where I don't have all the facts – or don't know both sides of a conflict
- *If it is a black-and-white / right-or-wrong issue addressed by clear biblical teaching – that's not so difficult*
- But often it's not that clear – and so I'm hesitant to speak too boldly
- The better I know someone – the more I'm able to give good guidance
- How many people know you inside and out?

- *They know your heart / your innermost thoughts and feelings and desires / they know your history and life experiences / they know your spiritual gifts and abilities and passions / they know your friends and family / they know your hopes and dreams and fears and anxieties*
- How many people like that do you have in your life – people who know you well enough and are wise and caring enough to give you sound advice and wise counsel?
- *Not many, right?*
- Think of the voices that you listen to – voices that shape your thoughts and opinions and values and beliefs and choices
- *How well do those voices know you?*
- How well do those voices know God and His will and plan for your life?
- Can you trust those voices to guide you on right paths that will lead to an abundant and meaningful and satisfying and fruitful life?
- *Or are you listening to voices that are just as likely to lead you astray?*
- And by the way, those voices that can lead you astray can come from the right as well as the left on the political spectrum
- Jesus the Good Shepherd knows you by name
- *He knows you better than anyone else knows you*
- He knows you better than you know yourself
- *We all have some blind spots*
- But Jesus looks at us and inside us with a light that illumines everything
- *He sees everything there is to see – and He knows everything there is to know about us – like no one else*
- And not only does He know you intimately – He knows God intimately – *and He loves and cares for you as no one else loves and cares for you*

John 10:14-15 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.

- *Therefore, you can trust His voice – you can trust His Word – you can trust His teachings and commandments – you can trust His guidance*
- Whatever the Good Shepherd speaks to you proceeds from His perfect and intimate knowledge of you and His perfect love for you and His true knowledge of God's best for you

- (Isaiah): He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.
- THAT is an intimate relationship unlike any other relationship in your life
- You can trust a Shepherd like that to guide you and care for you
- The Good Shepherd knows his sheep – *he knows the condition of their hearts // he knows what they need to thrive // he knows how to lead them where they can be well-fed and contented and secure*
- *And his sheep know and hear the shepherd's voice – and they follow him*
- If we are going to follow Jesus – we need to be able to recognize his voice
- Story: A long time ago – when there were still land lines for phones and answering machines
- *I called home and Beth wasn't home and so I left a message on the answering machine*
- Then I forgot about it
- *Several hours later I came home and checked the messages on the answering machine*
- And there was a message from this guy saying: *Please call me right away – I need to speak with you about something important*
- But he didn't leave a name or phone number – so how are we supposed to call him back?
- *I then said to Beth: Come and listen to this message. Some idiot said that we need to call him back right away about something important – but he didn't leave a name or number*
- Beth listened to the message and then burst out laughing
- *"Honey, that idiot is YOU – you left that message! You didn't recognize your own voice!"*
- If we're going to follow Jesus – we need to know him well enough that we can recognize his voice when he speaks to us

Bill Donahue relays a story from his time as a part-time youth pastor while attending seminary. *He was visiting a farm where two of his students lived, and their father decided to teach Bill a lesson:*

--He asked if I could help call in the sheep. I enthusiastically agreed. Sheep-calling was like preaching. We stood at the pasture fence, watching 25 sheep graze.

"Go ahead," he dared me. "Call them in."

"What do you say?" I asked.

"I just say, 'Hey, sheep! C'mon in!'"

No sweat, I thought. A city kid with a bad back and hay fever could do this. I began in a normal speaking voice, but Tom interrupted. "You are 75 yards away, downwind, and they have their backs to you. Yell! Use your diaphragm, like they teach you in preaching class."

--So I took a deep breath and put every inch of stomach muscle into a yell that revival preachers around the world would envy: *"Hey, sheep! C'mon in!"* The blessed creatures didn't move an inch. None even turned an ear.

--Then, raising his voice only slightly, Tom the farmer said: *"Hey, sheep! C'mon in!"* All 25 sheep turned and ambled toward us.

Tom then said to the seminary student: *"Do they teach you the Bible in that seminary? Have you ever read, 'My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me'?"*

- Here's the problem:
- *Some of you know Jesus as your Savior – but you don't know Him as your Good Shepherd*
- There are many people who know the Lord as their Savior but they do not know the Good Shepherd's voice - -and they are not following Him
- How about you?
- *Do you know Jesus as your Good Shepherd?*
- Do you know His voice – do you know how to listen for His voice – how to recognize His voice so that you can follow Him?
- *Of course He speaks to us in the Scriptures*
- But are you investing the time in cultivating the kind of intimate relationship with Jesus so that when you are reading the Bible or listening to a sermon or a worship song or just being quiet and silent in God's Presence – *that you can hear the Good Shepherd's voice – saying something personal – giving you personal guidance?*

- *'My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me'*

III. HE GIVES ABUNDANT LIFE

John 10:10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

- *The devil is a liar – and he has many mouthpieces to spread his lies – and some of those mouthpieces are really nice people who talk very convincingly about love and acceptance and inclusiveness*
- And then there are other mouthpieces who like to spread fear and hate and suspicion and prejudice
- *And then there are other mouthpieces who are skilled at tempting us to follow the desires of our heart because the desires of our heart always lead to life and happiness and fulfillment, right?*
- And then there are other mouthpieces who are skilled at stirring up offenses – *prompting us to be offended by biblical teachings and hard truths that are out of fashion and contrary to prevailing cultural trends*
- Some of these mouthpieces present themselves as shepherds – as teachers – as spiritual guides -- but they are leading people astray –
- The devil is a liar – a very persuasive liar – who often spreads his lies through very nice people -- but a liar nonetheless – and his purpose is to steal and kill and destroy
- *His purpose is to separate us from the One who is Life and is the source of abundant life*
- Jesus the Good Shepherd came that we may have life and have it abundantly – a full and meaningful and fruitful and satisfying life – a life that positively impacts other lives
- *A life like Dale Arentson's life*
- That kind of life is not found merely in accepting Christ as Savior once upon a time and then living a self-pleasing, self-directed life until we die and go to heaven
- *That kind of life – an abundant life – is found only in a real, personal, intimate relationship with Jesus as the Good Shepherd*
- The abundant life is not merely something that Jesus gives like Santa Claus giving gifts at Christmas

- That life is found only in Jesus – JESUS IS LIFE – and we experience that life only by abiding in Him – by living in connection with Him day by day and moment by moment
- *That LIFE is not something external to Him that He gives apart from His own Person*
- That Life is experienced only in union with Him who is Life
- *We are fully alive only when we live consistently in close connection with Jesus who is our Life*
- I accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior when I was 8 – but it was not until I was a freshman in college that I fully surrendered my life to Jesus Christ as Lord and was filled with the Holy Spirit and then began to experience an abundant and satisfying life
- *An abundant life is found by abiding in a close personal connection with Jesus as our Good Shepherd*

IV. HE FREELY LAYS DOWN HIS LIFE FOR THE SHEEP

John 10:17-18 “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

- Did Jesus die as a victim of Jewish injustice or Roman oppression?
- *Did Jesus die as an act of begrudging obedience to the will of God?*
- Did Jesus die prematurely at the young age of 33 before he could achieve even greater things in his ministry?
- *Could Jesus have lived a longer life if someone other than Caiaphas or Pilate had been in power?*
- Jesus did NOT die as a victim of injustice or oppression
- Jesus freely, willingly, voluntarily, sacrificially laid down his life of his own accord – his own free will
- *No one took Jesus’ life from him – NOT the Sanhedrin / Not the Jewish high priest / not the Roman governor / No One*
- Jesus sacrificed his life for us of his own accord as an act of self-giving, self-sacrificing love
- His life was threatened several times before

- *There were many powerful Jewish religious rulers who had wanted him dead for some time*
- *But his time had not yet come*
- *A time chosen by Jesus and His Father who were always of one mind and will*
- Was Jesus' death an act of obedience to the Father's will or an act of self-sacrifice according to Jesus' own will?
- YES – both
- *But the emphasis here by Jesus is that of the Good Shepherd freely and willingly and voluntarily laying down his life for the sheep*
- "Greater love has no one than this – that someone lay down his life for his friends"
- *Jesus' sacrificial death was the supreme example of this – but not the only example*
- In A Book of Saints, Anne Gordon tells the story of Father Maximilian Kolbe, who was a prisoner at Auschwitz in August 1941.
- *A prisoner escaped from the camp, and in reprisal, the Nazis ordered that ten prisoners had to die by starvation.*
- Father Kolbe offered to take the place of one of the condemned men. The Nazis kept Kolbe in the starvation bunker for two weeks and then put him to death by lethal injection on August 14, 1941.
- Thirty years later a survivor of Auschwitz described the effect of Kolbe's action: *"It was an enormous shock to the whole camp. We became aware that someone among us in this spiritual dark night of the soul was raising the standard of love on high. Someone unknown, like everyone else, tortured and bereft of name and social standing, went to a horrible death for the sake of someone not even related to him.*
- "To say that Father Kolbe died for us or for that person's family is too great a simplification. His death was the salvation of thousands. ... We were stunned by his act, which became for us a mighty explosion of light in the dark camp."
- *Jesus was not the only man in history to lay down his life for others – but he was the only one in history to take it up again*

V. HE HAS AUTHORITY OVER DEATH

John 10:18 “No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

- This is what makes Jesus unique among all spiritual leaders – among all other men or women
- *No other man in human history could have said those words – and then backed them up by rising from the dead*
- No other man in human history demonstrated authority over Death
- *It's one thing to lay your life down as an act of sacrificial love – it's quite another to take it up again*

- In my Bible reading Friday morning I read the story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mt Carmel
- *“The God who answers by fire – he is God”*
- In response to the prayers and pleadings of the prophets of Baal – *there was no voice – no one answered – no one paid attention*
- In response to the prayer of Elijah – the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust – *and licked up the water that was in the trench*
- *“Yahweh – He is God!”*

- Many religious leaders have taught spiritual truths – including teachings about life after death
- *They all died – Jesus too*
- And then God said in essence: The One who rises from the dead – He is My Son – He is Lord – He is the giver of eternal life
- Every other religious leader is still in his grave
- *But on the third day, Jesus rose from the dead – just as he said*
- Jesus Christ is Lord
- *Therefore, Jesus our Good Shepherd says:*

John 10:27-30 “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.”

- *Jesus is not only the Good Shepherd – he is our Eternal Shepherd*

Revelation 7:17 For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

- The Good Shepherd is unique – there is no one like him
- *But He does some of his shepherding through other shepherds – including pastors – but also fathers and mothers*

VI. FATHERS/PARENTS AS SHEPHERDS

- Kids need fathers.
- And we are seeing a father-absence crisis in America
- *Children raised in a father-absent home are vulnerable to these risks:*
- 85% of children and teens with behavioral disorders come from fatherless homes
- *Over 70% of all adolescent patients in drug and alcohol treatment centers come from homes without fathers*
- Kids raised in father-absent homes are 4 times more likely to live in poverty
- *More likely to suffer emotional and behavioral problems*
- Children raised in father-absent homes are more likely to commit crimes and go to prison
- *Teens without fathers are twice as likely to be involved in early sexual activity and 7 times more likely to get pregnant as a teen*
- Children in father-absent homes are two times more likely to drop out of high school
- *However much some people might like to believe that it doesn't matter whether or not there is a father in the home – it does matter*

- *Kids need fathers.*
- *And what exactly do kids need from their fathers?*

- Frederick Goodall: *7 Most Important Things*
- Time
- *Wisdom*
- Guidance
- *Encouragement*
- Protection

- *Patience*
- *Affection*
- *Gender identity is bestowed by the father*
- *A boy learns if he has what it takes to be a man from his father – and a girl learns if she is lovely and worth pursuing from her dad*

- *Dads: make sure your kids know that you love them*
- *And tell your sons: I'm proud of you. You have what it takes.*
- *And tell your daughters: How I delight in you. You are lovely.*
- *Tell them a thousand times in a hundred different ways over the course of their childhood – and you will have done a good job of fathering*

- *I would not have been a good father on my own – I have needed to abide in my heavenly Father's love and listen to His guiding voice in order to be able to love my daughters and meet their needs*
- *I have always known that my spiritual health was essential to my parenting*
- *I needed to be strong and healthy as a son of God in order to be competent as a father to my daughters*

- *Understanding something of my sisters' pain in being largely deprived of their father's love and attention and affection has helped me to understand how much my daughters would need my love and attention and affection*
- *Beth has been a wonderful role model for my daughters – but raising girls is not just for moms – Dads play a critical role as well*
- *The voice of a father is a powerful influence – for better or for worse – in a girl's life*

- *Many of us have been fathers and mothers so long, we have forgotten how to be sons and daughters of God*
- *Fathers and mothers need the Good Shepherd to feed us spiritually and to guide us in the right paths and to protect us from sin and evil*
- *Many of us have been bread-winners and bill-payers and care-givers and responsible adults and leaders and bosses and managers and shepherds so long, we have forgotten how to be sheep in God's flock*
- *Many of us have learned well how to be responsible and hard-working and strong and independent and self-sufficient and in control*
- *But we're not so good at resting / at trusting / at following / at being led / at being directed / at being cared-for / at being provided for / at being content*

- To be at our best as parents – we need to let the Good Shepherd care for us
- *We need to listen for His voice and follow Him*

VII. WHOSE VOICE ARE YOU FOLLOWING?

- In Israel today, it is still possible to witness a scene that Jesus almost certainly saw two thousand years ago, that of Bedouin shepherds bringing their flocks home from the various pastures they have grazed during the day.
- *Often those flocks will end up at the same watering hole around dusk, so that they get all mixed up together—eight or nine small flocks turning into a convention of thirsty sheep.*
- Their shepherds do not worry about the mix-up, however.
- *When it is time to go home, each one issues his or her own distinctive call—a special trill or whistle, or a particular tune on a particular reed pipe, and that shepherd's sheep withdraw from the crowd to follow their shepherd home.*
- They know whom they belong to; they know their shepherd's voice, and it is the only one they will follow.

- *So many competing and conflicting voices today on social media and in classrooms*
- *And so much misinformation – on the left and on the right -- And even in some churches that are more committed to being woke than to being faithful to biblical truth*

- How about you?
- *Do you know how to distinguish the Good Shepherd's distinct call from all the voices in our society that would lead you astray?*
- Are you willing to follow the Good Shepherd even if that means taking the road less travelled?
- If you have wandered away from the Good Shepherd's loving care – will you return today?
- *If you want to follow Jesus more closely, What steps are you taking to know the Good Shepherd and His voice better so that you can recognize His voice and His truth among all the counterfeits?*
- And when you hear His voice – will you obey – will you follow?

Prayer