

## “Our Good Shepherd”

Rev. Brian R. Louis, Faith Presbyterian Church, April 21, 2024

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. <sup>13</sup> The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. <sup>14</sup> I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own 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 do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. <sup>17</sup> For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. <sup>18</sup> No one takes<sup>[a]</sup> it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”

Holy wisdom, holy word.

Did you hear about the shepherd that retired to the Pacific Northwest?  
He was sheepless in Seattle.

In a sunny day in the fields, there is a shepherd and his dog herding their sheep. The shepherd asked his dog to round up the sheep to the fields. The dog went out and started herding the sheep to the field.

After a while the dog returned and told the shepherd that he already rounded up 20 sheep on the field. The shepherd was a bit confused because he did not have that many sheep, so he headed out to the fields and counted his sheep. The shepherd counted 17 sheep and wondered why his dog said 20.

He approached his dog and asked "there is only 17 sheep in the field. Why did you say there were 20?"

The dog turns toward the shepherd and said "I know, but I rounded them up."

There are many names for Jesus – Messiah, Son of Man, Son of God, rabbi, Savior of the world. Jesus has many names for himself, and others have come up with many names for him over the centuries. Today in our New Testament reading, he refers to himself as the Good Shepherd. These names I've mentioned all stand for and highlight different parts of who Jesus is. Sometimes people refer to him as Rabbi, for in addition to being the Son of God, he is also a great teacher. He is the one who preached the sermon on the mount, the most famous series of spiritual and moral lessons ever given. He taught through parables. He was always teaching.

This morning in John, he calls himself the Good Shepherd. All of these times we are told exactly who Jesus is. And in this instance, we are also taught who we are in relation to him. We are his sheep. We are under his care. The shepherd keeps careful watch over his sheep. In scripture he tells us that the good shepherd goes after even one of his sheep that strays and brings them back to the fold. The shepherd cares so much for his

sheep, that he will go out and find that lost sheep. In the gospel reading from John, Jesus also tells us exactly what he will do for us. He will lay down his life to save his sheep. He takes ultimate responsibility and ownership for this mission he has as our good shepherd; he will sacrifice himself for us. The good shepherd takes ownership of his mission to be shepherd over the flock. He loves his flock. The good shepherd has compassion and love for the sheep in his charge. We are in Christ's charge. We are the sheep. He is our shepherd. We belong to him.

The Good Shepherd will stand in the breach; the Good Shepherd will stand between the sheep and the predator. The Good Shepherd is willing to sacrifice. The Good Shepherd's instinct is to save the sheep in the Good Shepherd's care from the wolf. I will lay down my life for my sheep, the Good Shepherd says. The Good Shepherd is willing to sacrifice everything for his sheep. Our Good Shepherd will sacrifice everything for us, his sheep. Indeed, we know what Jesus, our Good Shepherd did for us, he laid down his life for us, as we know from scripture and what we read on Good Friday. We know Jesus, our Lord is true by his actions for us. He is the good shepherd. Our Good Shepherd.

Jesus is not the hired hand. He is the opposite of the hired hand. He behaves the opposite way of the hired hand.

At the first sign of danger the hired hand bails out. The hired hand does not have the courage or love of those he is supposed to care for. The hired hand is there to get paid, to get his. But when the first sign of difficulty comes, the hired hand flees. He doesn't want to sacrifice. He doesn't want to go the extra mile. He'll be there as long as he's getting paid and doesn't have to sacrifice.

The hired hand is the opposite of the Good Shepherd. He doesn't risk anything for the sheep. With the hired hand there is no sacrifice. The hired hand doesn't own the sheep. I can just hear all the excuses the hired hand makes for not helping and sacrificing for the sheep. Why should I risk my safety for them? I'm out of here. To heck with this. I'm not risking my life for something I don't own. I don't get paid enough to do this.

The hired hand has an attitude of, "What's in it for me?" And the hired hand concludes that there is not much in it for him. I'm not going to stick around and help the Good Shepherd. I'm out of here. Maybe the right thing to do is to stick around and help the shepherd. But the hired hand doesn't do that in this story. The hired hand bails out when he's really needed. The hired hand bails out when times get tough. When it is time to sacrifice and do the job, he runs away.

I would say most of the people here in the sanctuary today have lived lives of service and sacrifice. You've served in helping professions such as health care, or as counselors and therapists, you've served our country in the military, you are or have been teachers, you've worked in the civil service, you've provided professional services that helped people out. You've been stay at home mothers and fathers and sacrificed a great deal for your children. You all helped people. You made sacrifices. You persevered

and stepped into the breach when you had to like the Good Shepherd. You sacrificed in the spirit of the Good Shepherd.

We are called to be like Jesus if we are followers of Christ. We are supposed to follow his example. Jesus sacrificed a lot in his life, and his life was ultimately a sacrifice for all of us in his death and the triumph on the other side of the grave with his resurrection that we remember and celebrate in this season of Eastertide.

Sacrifice isn't all about laying down our lives for our friends. Or physically protecting people. Sacrifice is part of discipleship. Sacrifice is also self-denial. Theologian John Calvin talks a lot about self-denial. In Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, he writes about how Christ so strongly enforced that ethos on his disciples from the start. The gospel of Matthew says, (Mt. 16:24) "Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

Calvin writes, "The sum of the Christian life is denial of ourselves." Calvin writes that two of the end goals of self-denial are "That we may devote ourselves to God as a living sacrifice" and, "That we may not seek our own things, but those which belong to God and to our neighbour." (*Institutes* 3.7) (923)<sup>1</sup>

Jesus mentions laying down his life five times in our reading today. The repetition of that language of sacrifice, of self-denial, shows how important it is for him. It is something that the Lord is trying to communicate to us through the gospel writer John.

Jesus wants us to strive to be like him, like the Good Shepherd. I pray we can all be like our Good Shepherd. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> [The Institutes of the Christian Religion \(ntslibrary.com\)](http://ntslibrary.com)