

John 10:1-10 – Easter 4 – The Sheep Follow Him – April 26, 2026

+In Nomine Iesu+

As you may have guessed, today is Good Shepherd Sunday. It always falls on the 4th Sunday in Easter—at least in our three-year lectionary. You can hear it in the introit, our hymns, and our Gospel reading. And for us, Jesus is our Good Shepherd.

I like the way Jesus says it in the verse that immediately follows our reading. Our reading was just too short. Now, we will hear this verse next year on Easter 4. But we don't want to wait that long. Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

You can find this picture of Jesus throughout the Scriptures. In Hebrews, He is called the Great Shepherd. In 1 Peter, He is the Chief Shepherd. And here in John, He is the Good Shepherd. This is how Jesus would like to be known. This is His self-revelation. He is the Good Shepherd. And for emphasis, He says it twice in our short Gospel reading.

And although we are tempted to reduce these words of Jesus to a parable, Jesus isn't just *like* a good shepherd—He is the Good Shepherd. Now, if you want to say we are *like* sheep, fine. We are not literally sheep. We don't walk on all fours. We are not covered with wool.

But Jesus literally does shepherd us. The word "shepherd" is the source of our word "pastor." Sometimes, pastors are even called under-shepherds. So perhaps we can say today that Jesus is the Good Pastor. There is no analogy here.

Everyone is following someone. And we need a Good Shepherd—we need someone to direct us in straight paths—because we wander. We don't actually know where we are going. We need His leading and guiding. And Jesus is that Shepherd.

Here in John, as usual, Jesus chooses His words carefully. In Greek, as Jesus says, "I am the Good Shepherd," the "I am" part is emphasized. And this isn't the first time. He uses this emphatic construction more than 25 times in John's Gospel. And His first-century hearers would have remembered the interchange between God and Moses in Exodus chapter 3.

"Then Moses said to God, 'If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?' God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' And he said, 'Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

Jesus claims to be the great "I AM." So, the very first thing we must say about the Good Shepherd is that He is God. Now there are groups out there that deny the deity of Christ—both theologically—but also practically—in how they live. In our time, most people like to domesticate Christ.

But His transcendence is actually quite easy to find in the Scriptures. We see it especially in John's Gospel. In our reading from a few weeks ago, Thomas calls Jesus, "My Lord and God." And Jesus doesn't correct Thomas. Thomas gets it right. And it is indeed necessary. Apart from Jesus' deity, there would be no forgiveness of sins for any of us. Only one who is Divine can lay down His life for the sins of the world.

Next, Jesus reveals Himself as the *Good* Shepherd. As God, Jesus alone is truly good in the ultimate sense. In Luke 18, when someone calls Jesus Good Teacher. Jesus asks, "Why

do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.” Now, that person was right—Jesus is the Good Teacher—but it’s not what this man meant.

When we call each other “good,” at best, we are just a dim reflection of the ultimate goodness of God that we see in Jesus. And “good” as it defines Jesus as our Shepherd means much more than our generic definition of “good.” *Good* means that He is noble, virtuous, holy, and perfect. He is the genuine and eternal expression of all that is good. And His goodness faileth never.

When we think of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, we often think of the 23rd Psalm. I think Jesus even intends this. “The Lord is my Shepherd...” We heard these words in our introit.

The dominant work of the Shepherd here is care. In Ezekiel 34, the Lord says, “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.”

The Good Shepherd watches over His flock. He cares for us. He rescues us when we are lost. He attends to our wounds, especially the ones the world cannot see. And He gives us strength when we are weak. This is a beautiful picture of Christ and His work for us. But it isn’t so flattering of us. This suggests that we are lost, we have strayed, we are damaged, we are weak.

To call Jesus the Good Shepherd means that we need to be shepherded. But this is a counter-cultural idea. The goal for many in this life is to be independent, self-sufficient, self-realized, autonomous beings. We don’t need a shepherd. We know right where we are going. We are strong and confident. We resist authority.

We make our own destiny. We can fix any problem. We don’t need anyone else. But as Jesus reveals Himself as the Shepherd, we begin to realize that we are actually a lot like sheep. And sheep have problems. Sheep stink. Sheep wander aimlessly. The wool starts to itch. And perhaps most troubling, sheep get eaten.

In John’s Gospel, the dominant work of the Good Shepherd is protection. He protects us from our enemies. It is as the Psalmist says, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.” The shepherd’s job was tiring, manly, even dangerous. The shepherd’s job was to protect the sheep from bad weather, and predators, and even from themselves. And Jesus’ identity as the Good Shepherd was perilous because of the great danger His sheep faced.

Jesus names two different kinds of dangers for His sheep. First there is the “hired hand.” If we look back to the last verses of chapter nine and we discover that Jesus’ audience included the Pharisees. And Jesus revealed that although they were confident in their spiritual life and insight, they were actually blind. They thought they were fine leaders for God’s people. But in reality they were worthless.

They were the hired hands who don’t care about the sheep. When trouble comes, they fail to protect the sheep and selfishly flee for their own lives. In the words of the Prophet Zechariah 11, they were the shepherd “who does not care for those being destroyed, or seek the young or heal the maimed or nourish the healthy, but devours the flesh of the fat ones, tearing off even their hoofs. Woe to my worthless shepherd, who deserts the flock!”

Perhaps today, we can compare these hired hands to those who guide us religiously, but do so with selfish motives. They might be slick. They might be on the best seller list. They might fill a room. They might have a huge YouTube following.

Their message might even be appealing, telling us what our itching ears want to hear. But they don't care for the sheep. They don't say the hard things. They don't live godly lives. And eventually the truth comes out. Their motives are revealed. In a moment of crisis—or of scandal—they abandon the sheep.

But the important point here is that Jesus is not like them. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He will never leave or abandon His sheep. If we were to keep reading in chapter ten, Jesus says this about His care for His sheep, “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.”

Hear the permanence in Jesus' work for us who believe. Everything is so definite, so solid, so safe. We hear Him. He knows us. We follow Him. The life He gives is eternal. We will never perish. No one can wrest us from His care.

Second, there is the “wolf.” This is the one from whom the hired hand runs. Now, the identity of the wolf is a little hard to determine. This is the only place in the entire New Testament where the word “wolf” is found. But here, we should see our spiritual enemies—those of the devilish varieties—there is a spiritual war going on even still—and, of course, their human counterparts. But the emphasis here is not on the wolf, but on the Shepherd. And what He is willing to do for His flock.

Jesus says four times in this chapter in slightly different ways, “I lay down my life for the sheep.” In the face of trouble, when His sheep are under attack, He is willing to die for His sheep. He will fight that wolf to the death.

And so perhaps it is best to say that the “wolf” is also sin. Sin is perilous. It destroys us, it snatches us up, and scatters us. It leaves us beaten, injured, and lost.

Because of sin, the sheep are in mortal danger—eternal danger. And in their defense, the Shepherd loses His life. But in His death, they are rescued. That, and that alone, qualifies Him as the Good Shepherd. He is the Good Shepherd on the cross. Jesus' death is here presented as a sacrifice particularly directed at the redemption of His sheep. He was willing to die for us. And He did.

So, Jesus is our Shepherd, and He is good. He is God. He is our Protector. And He is just the Protector we need. He protects us from the hired hand. He protects us from the wolf. He protects us from sin, its temptations, and its consequences.

He protects us from each other. He protects us from ourselves. And He protects us with His very life. He lays it down for us. And in the death of the Good Shepherd, and in His resurrection, we are made one with the Shepherd.

We are one with Him as He is one with the Father. We begin to know Him as He knows us. We know His voice—we internalize it—we make it our own—and we are no longer deceived by hired hands and wolves. We let Him lead. We follow. And we are safe and secure.

True, we are still also sheep, and sheep are messy, and difficult, and foolish, and headstrong. We get lost pretty easily. We don't always know where we are going. But that's why we need the Shepherd.

We are sheep—but we are sheep in His care. He never leaves us. He never forsakes us. He comes to get us when we wander. And in His care, we are one flock. We have one Shepherd. He leads us in the way that He would have us go. Being under the care of a Shepherd is not easy—but it is good. But maybe David says it best.

“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.” In the name of Jesus. Amen.

+Soli Deo Gloria+