

11 “I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 The hired man, who is not a shepherd, does not own the sheep. He sees the wolf coming, leaves the sheep, and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the sheep and scatters them. 13 Because he works for money, he does not care about the sheep. 14 “I am the Good Shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me 15 (just as the Father knows me and I know the Father). And I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 I also have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. Then there will be one flock and one shepherd. 17 This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life so that I may take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have the authority to lay it down, and I have the authority to take it up again. This is the commission I received from my Father.”

What Makes the Good Shepherd so Good?

One of the things that I enjoy the most is to go on nature hikes and bike rides. Last summer we were able to hike the trails along Tahquamenon Falls. They were beautiful. But the trails were muddy and slippery, and someone had to guide the way through them so as not to get stuck in the mud. There was the need for water. Someone needed to carry that backpack with water and snacks. No matter how beautiful the trail is, it still takes takes patience and strength to guide a clan of people through a forest, beautiful as it may be.

God uses a similar comparison when He speaks of Himself as the Good Shepherd, drawing on the imagery of Psalm 23. He uses His rod and His staff to guide us through some beautiful places, besides still waters and green pastures. He even prepares a table for us and anoints our heads with oil. It is a beautiful picture of calmness and tranquility and care as God guides us through life, feeding us and speaking to us and taking care of us. We lack nothing.

But Psalm 23 doesn't paint us a picture of a Shepherd who is a helicopter mom. In the Disney movie “Finding Nemo” I think I can recall Nemo's father promising him that he would never let anything happen to Nemo. If I remember right he was reprimanded for that. Who would want to live a life where they were completely sheltered from everything like a boy wrapped in bubble wrap and kept indoors? As sinful as our world is, God still allows us to experience it and even suffer in it as we go through life. There is no choice in the matter. We are born in a valley of the shadow of death with plenty of enemies that want to devour us.

Jesus spoke of one of the greatest dangers that sheep have to face: the wolves that come in to attack the sheep and scatter them. We are familiar with wolves being portrayed as the villain from our children's stories. Think of Little Red Riding Hood, who went to visit her grandmother, only to encounter a cross dressing wolf dressed up as her grandmother. The wolf tried to use deception in order to draw her

closer and eat her. The three little pigs who had a wolf come and try to devour them in their different houses. You might also think of the boy who cried “wolf” one too many times. The wolf is depicted to our youth as a ravenous and hungry predator. And God’s Word says the same. When Paul was getting ready to leave Ephesus on his way to Jerusalem, knowing that prison and hardships were ahead. What really concerned him was what would happen to them after he left. He said,

“I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.” (Acts 20)

The wolves would arise from within their own fold, with the purpose of drawing away disciples AFTER THEM, in order to get their attention and their loyalty and their money. It would ultimately cost the other sheep their souls. How would they do that? By trying to look more attractive, more fun, more cutting edge: by appearing more authoritative: by promising the sheep things that they wanted and desired. They would claim to have special revelations from God. They would claim to have special favor from God and they would also claim to have the keys to receiving great gifts from God. So the sheep would run from one seeming oasis after another, only to be left starving by the mirage of empty promises that would lead away from Christ.

In 2014 this very thing happened at a place called Mars Hill Church in Seattle. Mark Driscoll was the lead pastor there, who was claiming to receive visions from God and telling the congregation what they needed to do and how they needed to do it. When several pastors within the congregation dared to question his vision, he took advice from an mixed martial artist and “threw them under the bus.” He said,

‘There is a pile of dead bodies behind the Mars Hill bus, and by God’s grace, it’ll be a mountain by the time we’re done. You either get on the bus or you get run over by the bus. Those are the options. But the bus ain’t going to stop!’

Finally, Mark Driscoll was removed from the congregation, but by that time the damage was done. There were rifts and problems throughout. What did he do? He simply moved on and started a new congregation in Phoenix and gathered a new following.

<https://www.thedailybeast.com/controversial-megachurch-pastor-mark-driscoll-finds-a-new-flock>

And that’s the sad thing. The sheep end up leaving all churches and say, “I don’t want anything to do with church.” But then who will come to visit them in the hospital? How will they receive the Supper? Who will they find for support in their faith? Ultimately, the devil is happy. People are exposed and left vulnerable without the Word and the sacrament, and God never designed His people to be alone. He always designed us to come together. Jesus wants there to be **“one flock and one shepherd.”** Jesus wants to bring people together, to come and worship Him and feed from Him.

How does this happen? **They will listen to my voice.** Where do they find His voice? In the Word of God and in the sacraments. In the liturgy. From the sermon and in Bible studies. It shouldn’t matter

who the preacher is. Everyone has a different style and a different personality. But all should preach and teach Law and Gospel from the same Bible and all should have a high view of the way God powerfully works in and through baptism and the Lord's Supper. After I left Topeka, one of my former members told me that she no longer attends church because she doesn't care for the new pastor. That upset me the most, it's not the way I trained her. I wanted her to come to church for the Word and the sacrament: for Jesus, no matter who was preaching and teaching. But the devil always wants us to get upset and divided about the music or the stewardship or the other people that come to worship, instead of just listening to the Word and feeding on Jesus.

When we receive Jesus, then we receive God's mercy and love and forgiveness. One of the most wonderful things about our Good Shepherd is His personal attention to us and His knowledge of us. **I am the Good Shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me 15 (just as the Father knows me and I know the Father).** This seems like a hyperbole. It almost has to be. I can understand how Jesus must know me as well as He knows the Father. I'm a lot easier to see and know than the Father. I feel sorry that Jesus has to see me as I am so sinful. But how could I know Jesus as He knows the Father? Nonetheless, whether it is hyperbole or not, this is what makes Jesus THE Good Shepherd. He knows us so well! He knows our weakness and our strengths. He knows what we need and when we need it, whether it be suffering or success. Here's an interesting thing: He knows us better than we even know ourselves. Think of when a parent knows his child is getting tired and needs a nap. The child doesn't believe it. The child fights it. But when the child is forced to go down to lay down, he falls right asleep. That's how the Good Shepherd is with us. He knows us well.

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, wants His shepherds to know his flock as well. This isn't to be looked at as a business proposition. It is a bigger spiritual family that comes together around a common table. He wants us to talk with each other, pray for each other, and strengthen each other. He wants us to KNOW each other. In order for a pastor to be a good pastor, he needs your cooperation. You need to seek to hear God's Word through your pastor. It is helpful to the both of us if you come to confess your sins. Some people come in and are afraid to talk to the pastor about their problems. The first thing they say is, "You're going to think less of me." That's simply not true. I think MORE of you when you come in for guidance for God's Word. It troubles me when you're willing to spend thousands of dollars on a secular counselor who has no wisdom or guidance from the Word of God for you, but you are unwilling to come in and talk with a pastor. What kind of a relationship is that? Is it any wonder when the church is struggling, when sheep don't want their shepherd to know them? Is it any wonder that churches are falling apart when sheep aren't seeking to know the Good Shepherd more through the worship services and Bible studies? The devil wants this.

But I think of the Courageous Men's Bible study, where we get together and discuss God's Word and enjoy time talking to each other and knowing each other. I think of the women's Bible study on Thursdays and Sunday mornings: of when we come together and commune: the devil hates this: for this

is what the Good Shepherd wants. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, has designed the church to have pastors who are willing to sacrifice their time and their effort to make sure you are well fed with the Word.

What is the key thing that makes Jesus our Good Shepherd? Jesus says it twice. **The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.** This is all important, for if Jesus didn't lay His life down for us, then we would still be in our sins. He didn't lay His life down for Himself. He did it for the sheep, the sheep that went astray and deserved to die. When David went to protect his sheep he had to face a lion and a bear, much more ferocious enemies than a wolf. But Jesus' wolf was even worse than that. Jesus had to face death itself, God's wrath itself, in order to pay for our sins. This is what makes Him not just a good shepherd, but THE Good Shepherd, the BEST Shepherd, the ONLY true Shepherd that saves us from our sins.

It's kind of interesting, Jesus said that when the wolf comes, the man who is only in it for the money "abandons" the sheep. The word for "abandons" is the same word that means "forgive." So I thought this to be an interesting contrast. The hired hand - in order to save himself - leaves the sheep behind because he was only in it for the money. Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, in order to save us - did not abandon us. He actually became flesh, and He in fact became sin for us on the cross. He came to us. His way to forgive us was to become us. The only thing He abandoned was the grave, in order to conquer the grave for all who believe in Him. We don't have a dead Shepherd. We have a live Shepherd, who still has the power and authority to take care of the flock and protect the flock and feed the flock through His Word and sacrament: through shepherds who point the sheep to Him. Why did Jesus do this? He didn't do it for money, for He owns everything. He did it because He is a God of compassion, because He CARES for us, because He is the Good Shepherd.

I am the Good Shepherd. "Good" seems almost too generic to describe Jesus. How did you like the meal? It was "good." Hmmm. It wasn't great? It was just good? When I ask my children if they want to do something like help clean the garage they will sometimes say, "No, I'm good." You want something to eat? "I'm good." You want to play buckets? "I'm good." I'm beginning to think that "good" is the new word for "lazy."

But when Jesus says, "I'm good," it means something different. The word in the Greek is "kalos." It can be translated in a number of ways, such as "powerful, excellent, beautiful, and attractive." All of these different meanings can really be brought together under the idea of "What is ordered or sound." What it seems to convey is that He is the Shepherd that we need, the One who does exactly what is needed for our situation. We needed God to come in and die for our sins. We needed someone who wasn't in it for money or for pay, but someone who to His very core was caring and kind. We needed someone who also had the authority not just to lay down His life, but also the power to conquer death and come back from the dead. Jesus is our Good Shepherd because He did everything that needed to be done. He didn't because He wanted to do it. He did it because He is the very definition of Good. Because of that, we lack absolutely nothing. Thanks be to God. Amen.