

TEXT: John 10:11-18

THEME: SAFE UNDER OUR SHEPHERD'S CARE

Dear Fellow Sheep of the Good Shepherd:

"No one ever washes a rental car." In other words, if you don't own something and have no stake in its long-term future, you're not going to take care of it the same way you would if it belonged to you. Conversely, if you own something, you will take better care of it. You will spend the time, energy, and funds required to keep it looking nice and running well.

Today, with the help of the Holy Spirit, consider the blessing and comfort of knowing that we are owned by the Good Shepherd. Jesus said, **"I am the good shepherd....The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep."** When the waters of Baptism dripped on our foreheads, God placed his name on us and said, "You are mine!" When the Holy Spirit worked faith in our hearts through the lifesaving gospel, a relationship was formed between God and us. He claimed each of us as his own. What a difference that makes! Now, since God has a vested interest in us, we know that he will stick by us in all situations. Since he gave us his own Son to be our Savior from sin, death, and hell, we can be sure he will give us all good things as well (Romans 8:28).

There are many times in life when we need that assurance. The devil attacks God's flock from many directions. He attacks our faith, trying to fill us with doubts: How can homosexuality be a sin when I know gay people who are so nice? He attacks our confessional position, urging us to compromise our beliefs and to go along to get along with the sins of the world, like living together without being married. Who does that offend anymore...except God? He works to wedge sin into our relationships and drive us apart through malicious gossip and ruining each other's reputation. He is always trying to fuel and fan each person's sinful nature into a flame, using each of our pet sins and special weaknesses as his entry point. Then we feel that our sins have gone over our heads, that we are drowning in sin, and that there is no hope. We feel that he, Satan, has become our shepherd, and we know he is not a good shepherd.

We find ourselves facing challenges too daunting to tackle alone, and we ask, "Where can I turn?" We don't have to turn anywhere. Jesus, our Good Shepherd, is there. Our Good Shepherd lovingly promises, "I'll stick by you. I will not run from you. You are my own possession, bought with my blood." Since he invested his life in order to buy us, since we are not a rental, we know he'll do whatever is necessary to keep us in his flock. We may not always like that. A hit on the head with the Shepherd's rod or a jerk on our neck with the Shepherd's crook may hurt at the time, but the results are eternally fantastic.

Our Good Shepherd also said, **"I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd."** I was a bit timid when I traveled to India, a country where less than 2% of the people claim to know Jesus as their Savior. What would I say? What would the people think of me? What would it be like to be a Christian in such a heathen country?

With such thoughts nervously racing through my head, I entered the hotel that would be my home for the next three weeks. The bellhop smiled ear-to-ear and greeted me in broken English, “My name Daniel.” By sharing his Christian name, the bellhop was letting me know that he too was a Christian. What a relief to know that the Good Shepherd has his elect, his flock, all over the world! Even though we were from completely different cultures, we were united as sheep of the same flock. That helped fuel my enthusiasm to share the voice of Jesus with other people so that they too could be brought into the fold.

It is so easy for us to lament the people that are straying away from God and his Word; we have a lot of them right here at Trinity. And yes, it is good to be anxious about people who don’t know what Jesus has done for them. God wants us to have a passion for the lost. But let’s not forget to rejoice about the way God’s Word continues to bear fruit. He is still in control. In spite of the devil’s roadblocks, our loving Shepherd has sheep that he “**must bring [in].**” It is not an option. It is something he must do. He *will* find his sheep.

By God’s grace, you and I are part of the Lord’s flock. In his own time and in his own way, God brought us into his sheep pen. Now we are linked to the countless others who listen to the same voice of the same Good Shepherd.

In the last verse of our text, our Good Shepherd said, “**No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again.**” “You’re not the boss of me!” Those words landed a certain three-year-old in a heap of trouble with his parents. But doesn’t that phrase communicate what many of us wish we could say to a variety of people on a daily basis? Our society is built on climbing the ladder—the social ladder or the corporate ladder. Seemingly, our goal is to be able to tell everyone, “You’re not the boss of me!”

We may reach a point when we are able to say that to some, but not to death. Death still reigns, taking a back seat to no one. The mortality rate is still 100%; no one can look death in the eye and say, “You’re not the boss of me!”

No one, that is, except our Good Shepherd. True, for a time it did not look that way. On that Friday so many years ago, it looked as if Death had pulled rank over the Son of God. When Jesus’ body was placed in the garden tomb, Death stood by and laughed. “That will show you who’s boss around here,” Death jeered. What Death didn’t know was that Jesus had laid down his life by an act of his own will. And that all became evident a few days later when Jesus broke free of Death’s grip. On Sunday morning it became loud and clear who the boss was and the empty tomb of Jesus proves it.

Jesus continues to be boss today. What does Jesus do as our boss? The same thing he did for himself. He promises that he will use his authority to give us life. Our Boss says, “**Because I live, you also will live**” (John 14:19). Having a Boss with so much authority, once again we realize how safe we are under our Good Shepherd’s care; we are even safe in the face of Death. Therefore, we can look Death in the eye and taunt, “You’re not the boss of me. Jesus is.” As the hymnwriter describes, *The foe in triumph shouted when Christ lay in the tomb. But lo, he now is routed; his boast is turned to gloom. For Christ again is free; in glorious victory he who is strong to save has triumphed o’er the grave* (CW 156:2). Amen.