

April 25th, 2021
Good Shepherd Sunday
Pastor Matthew Ude

The Pronouns of the Good Shepherd

John 10:11-18 ¹¹ "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. ¹² "But a hireling, *he who is* not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. ¹³ "The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. ¹⁴ "I am the good shepherd; and I know My *sheep*, and am known by My own. ¹⁵ "As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. ¹⁶ "And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock *and* one shepherd. ¹⁷ "Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. ¹⁸ "No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father."

I am the good shepherd. – Jesus says, "I and I alone am the good shepherd. There is no other good shepherd."

There was not really any lower station in life than being a shepherd. Jesus certainly isn't choosing a flattering image of himself when he chooses to associate himself with the image of a shepherd. It was a quite simple job. You find grass and let them eat. You find a stream and let them drink. You bring them back and put them in the pen at night. You watch them to make sure they do not stray or get attacked. It was David the youngest of Jesse's sons who was out watching the sheep. If you can't do anything else, you can go watch the sheep.

Considering what a low station it was, what does it say about us that we often fail to be good shepherds. Jesus must step in and do it for us.

"I am the good shepherd," says Jesus, "Not you."

Most of us in one way or another have the role of shepherd.

Pastor, elders, councilmen, teachers, school board, Sunday school teachers, but most of all as parents. In these roles and many others, it is our job to be shepherds. But we so often fail at it. We fail to show love and patience when we should and instead get angry. We fail to correct and discipline when that is what our kids need because it is just easier to let them have their way. We sometimes choose what we think will make us happy instead of what is best for our kids. We continue to sin, our kids see our sins and learn them from us. We see our sins reflected in them and because of guilt and fear we overreact with threats and demands.

We are not good shepherds.

Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd." And with these words announce the truth that he alone is the good shepherd.

Yet his words are not so much a condemnation as they are a promise. We are not very good at being parents and teachers and pastors, but says Jesus, "I am here to fill in where you fail." That isn't an excuse for us to do a bad job but a comfort when we fail.

Jesus is always the one who steps in and finishes what we were supposed to do. It is no less true here. It is true that our failures endanger the sheep that have been put into our care, but instead of despairing we bring them to Christ as those mothers did so long before. They brought the little children to Jesus and he blessed them. The one thing we can do which will make up for quite a bit of failing on our part is to bring them to Jesus. "I am the good shepherd." He can fix what we have broken.

I am the good shepherd.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd because of what **he** does. **He** lays down **his** life for the sheep.

He lays down even more than his life. The Greek word is *psuchae*, meaning soul. He lays down even his soul for our sake. We talk about Jesus dying for our sins. But the dying he did was not the death of his body but the death of his soul. The price he paid for our sins was not what happened at the end of the time on the cross, but the whole six hours when he was on the cross and his soul suffered death for our sakes.

Jesus proves that he is the good shepherd because he is willing to suffer this death in our place. The one hired to watch sheep would never do this. He watches only for the sake of being paid. If he dies what good will it do him to watch the sheep. When there is danger he abandons the sheep. He forgets about them and flees.

When the hire help forgets the sheep, the Greek is *aphiaemi*. It is the same word that is often translated forgive. The hireling leaves the sheep behind. Jesus does not leave the sheep behind but their sins. As quick as the hireling is to forget the sheep when he sees danger, just as quick Jesus is to forget our sins when we repent.

Because they belong to him he knows them and they know him.

We might expect a reversal of the possessive in verse 14. Something like "I know my own and they know their shepherd." But that is not what Jesus says. Rather it is always about what He does, never about what we do. He does not talk about him belong to us, but only about us belonging to him.

I know my own, and my own know me. Because we belong to him, he knows us by name and he teaches us to know his voice. It does not matter what the sheep do or think, what matters is what the shepherd does. He has claimed us as his, and therefore we are his.

Sheep do not seek out a shepherd, but a shepherd seeks out the sheep, and when he has found them, they learn to know and trust his voice. So also we did not seek him, but he found us and call us by name and we have learned to know that voice which calls to us.

He not only lays down his life but he takes it up again as well.

It is a fine thing if someone is willing to die for us. But then that is it. That is all they can do.

Jesus not only is willing to lay down his life for us, but he also can take it up again. If someone loves us enough to lay down his life for us and has the power to take it up again, then we have a shepherd who is not only willing but able, not only able but willing.

He died and he rose again, he found us, he called us, he leads us and gives us all that we need for this life and that which is to come.

He loved us enough to lay down his life and has the power to guard and keep us.

“You are with me”

Our final pronoun does not come from the text of John but from that greatest of all psalms, Psalm 23.

In Psalm 23 David begins with a description of all the Jesus does for us as our good shepherd. A description which is remarkably similar to what Jesus himself says in our text. He feeds us. He leads us. He gives us life. But then if you look in verse 4, when David is walking under the shadow of death, it is no longer he but “you.”

David is that sheep whom Christ has found and taught to know his name. In time of trouble David knows how to call out to him who is able to save from death. “You are with me.”

In times of fear, in times of loneliness, in times of darkness and death, it does not matter any more what Jesus has done, or what he does for others, what matters is that he is there with us.

We pray that Jesus would as our good shepherd teach us also to know his name so that like David when we are in trouble and danger we may cry with David in faith, “You are with me.”

I am the good shepherd, the one who alone is able to watch and guard and keep.

He is the good shepherd because he has done it all for us.

“You are with me,” even when we pass through fire and trials.

Amen