**John 10:11-18 (ESV)**

**“**I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. **12** He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. **13** He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. **14**  I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, **15**  just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. **16** And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. **17**  For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. **18**  No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

**“The Good Shepherd”**

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. In our present age, life seems more managed than a type of caring relationship. The act of producing is more important than the product itself. The price as the bottom-line is what leads to having to wait in line. The personal touch cannot keep up with the time it takes to do everything else. It is in such a cold and machine like world that we live God dare to speak the Gospel of true love for a sinful world. A perfect relationship has burst forth from the grave. The risen Savior Jesus Christ cares. His suffering and death holds the promise for us to trust in Him.

Jesus in our reading from St. John describes this relationship by claiming to be the Good Shepherd. He did this at the time when everyone in Jerusalem was celebrating the annual feast of booths. The Jews were to honor God’s care for them as they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years after the Exodus. God leading His people Israel to the Promised Land lead Jesus to promise the loving kindness He had for sinners by being the Good Savior. This imagery of the shepherd and sheep stood right in the face of the Pharisees who heard these words. They appeared nothing like shepherds, only popular rulers managing people for their own glory and benefit. Even still today, Jesus proves He is the good shepherd by the life He gives for you His sheep.

First, we need to understand what this identity of being “sheep.” Sounds cute and cuddly, maybe something like a stuffed animal or a nice sticker. However, it means we are vulnerable. Plenty imagine everything to be safe. So long as things are stable in society, with government managing the situations that arise all is right with the world. Treading through life unaware of the true danger at hand shows how naïve the baptized can be. There are false pastors and teachers just as the wolf wants to come and make a mess of things. Jesus gives the warning, “He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.” Since Pastor is Latin for “Shepherd,” those called to preach, teach, and administer the sacrament to care for and protect Christ’s flock, the Church.

Jesus is with you to save from sin, death, devil, oh, baptized sheep. If it were not for Him making the move, so long to sinners every last one. Yet, He says, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” What protects the baptized is the faithfulness of Jesus as the Savior. He stands against the darkness and uses His own life to destroy it. As St. John said in his letter, “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.” The sacrifice by God’s Son shapes the office of the Holy Ministry given to the Church. Christ gave it for the sake of His sheep. Luther declares, “Faithful shepherds, must both pasture or feed the lambs and guard against wolves so that they will flee from strange voices and separate the precious from the vile” (Tappert 506:14).

Of course, sheep hear all kinds of sounds that can easily scare them. If the ear is not attune to what the savior says, there can be dire consequences. Those baptized ignoring the voice of the Good Shepherd have only themselves to blame. They end up falling prey to the devil and the deception he brings. Rather than listening to the preached Word of Christ, it means paying more attention to that person in the pulpit. It leads to disappointment because their failures are too great so what is the point. Worse, it can lead to the opposite extreme, which is praise that puts someone on a pedestal. Either way, the only relationship given for the sheep is to hear the voice of Jesus. It is to trust Him whose Word forgives, leads, and saves us. The Lord promised, “And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.”

Jesus knows you as His own by what He says. If He had to die for no one else, He would have still died for you. So deep is this relationship with His sheep, that Jesus is unwilling to sever the connection. He said, “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep” What God has within Himself, we have with Jesus. Any who turns in repentance to hear the forgiving Word of Christ has exactly what He says. The care He brings comes from the love He sacrificed on the cross. This relationship turns out to be more than a one-way street. The good shepherd knows and is known by His sheep. As St. Paul said to Timothy, “But God’s firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: “The Lord knows those who are his,” and, “Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity” (2 Tim 2:19). Those forgiven follow the voice of forgiveness that makes a way for our life.

Sheep need the personal touch that only the good shepherd can give. This is why Jesus takes the lead in everything as Savior. He dies for the sheep in order to save them. He lives for the sheep in order to remain the good shepherd. Even King David who came from being a shepherd to ruling all of Israel, praised the love God so freely gave time and again. He declared in the famous Psalm 23, “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 (Psalms 23:1-3). Without Jesus, the whole Christian Church would be a mess not merely in our time, but throughout time. Yet, there is one flock because there is only one good shepherd for all the baptized. As St. Peter said, “This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.”

Jesus lives before you forever out of love, whether in Word and Sacrament on earth or in eternal glory in heaven. The Father loves His Son, because no else in any time or space was ever permanent and long lasting. Sure, a person could die for a good cause or out of love for his people, but that would be the end of it. Jesus said about His death and life, “No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.” It is because of His death that the sheep recognize the risen life of the good shepherd going before us. If Jesus willed His death as the sacrifice for sins, then His resurrection comes from the same will that has also silenced the grave. None of it is for Himself, but so that the sheep would have a shepherd that would not go away. Jesus proves He is the good shepherd by the life He gives for you His sheep. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with you hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting, Amen.