

Sermon for the Fourth Sunday of Easter April 26, 2026 jj
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✠ sdg ✠

Today you may have associated with the title "Good Shepherd Sunday." Our crucified and risen Lord and Savior Jesus does indeed call Himself the Good Shepherd. He does so in this chapter, John 10, in fact. However, this is not the year in our church calendar when that reading shows up, even though we still have this morning the very familiar words of the beloved 23rd Psalm, "The Lord is my shepherd." Perhaps you have a fairly well-informed notion of what makes Jesus the Good Shepherd. In the past few weeks we have reviewed the very pinnacle of His salvation work- He died on the cross and rose from the dead. We confess His Shepherd credentials whenever we say the Creed. Since a Good Shepherd sacrifices His life in order to save His wandering sheep, it's easy to see why Jesus is the Good Shepherd.

But today's portion of John chapter 10 emphasizes something different, even though at the same time it's related to Jesus' claim to be the Good Shepherd that comes in the verses right after what we read together. What, if I may ask you instead this time around, what makes a good sheep? Because that's what these first few verses of the chapter are particularly concerned with, the discernment that the sheep demonstrate regarding the shepherd's voice, and their obedient response to those actions that He does for their benefit.

Jesus includes quite the list here: a good sheep pays attention to the door, you could say the gate if you're talking about a sheepfold, I suppose. Anyone entering

another way besides the arranged, regular, safe way, cannot be someone who brings good, no matter how it may appear. The Door determines whether we are dealing with shepherd or robber. There is a doorkeeper working there, and it's curious that Jesus doesn't attach much significance to him in His example, but we know at least that, whoever the doorkeeper is, it is someone working with the shepherd, not against Him. The good sheep know and are comforted by that relationship, too. They need to take note, though, of anyone who comes in the pen by an unapproved way, by stealth or unusual means, like climbing the fence in some other quadrant rather than by using the door. That one the invader, the good sheep does well to flee and avoid. They don't recognize the voice of strangers, but they are attentive to the voice of their Shepherd. There is familiarity between Shepherd and sheep due to a long-standing relationship, even though amazingly He says that everyone before Him were the robbers, and the good sheep did not hear or obey them. They are ready to follow Him, however, because He calls them, even by their own name, and personally He leads them and passes in front of them.

Am I one of those good sheep? Are you? Are we as attentive to our Shepherd's voice as we should be? Have you been diligent to maintain the relationship that Jesus has established with you through speaking His Voice in His Word, the Holy Scripture? If you're honest with yourself, you would have to admit, there have been times when I was not as eager to follow my Shepherd's Voice as I ought to have been. Times of conflict, struggle, spiritual testing were sent my way

by the Father's gentle hand, but in those times, on how many occasions did I look for another entry, another access point to the good blessings that I could tell myself now, they come only from my merciful Lord, but I wanted to acquire those good things from some other source than from the Savior who gently calls me by my name? I have not been a good sheep, nor have you. Having been pulled out of the muck so many times and redirected by rod and staff to fresh, green grass, you've chosen instead to stumble back into the ravine and get yourself stuck once again.

How good it is for us, for you, not so good sheep that you may be, that you have the Lord as your Shepherd! Your Jesus has identified Himself to you as your Door, your sheepfold Gate, your one, dependable, safe, God-approved access to your true home with your Creator, your kind Savior. He came to restore your soul, to make your cup runneth over, to anoint your head with oil and lead you in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. When He called you by your name in your Baptism, you became His sheep. His voice established a relationship with you that He will never end or recall or invalidate.

To be a good sheep, it is not a goal for you to strive for and a scale to which you compare yourself or others. Instead, it's all about receiving the good gifts of your Lord, most of all the free forgiveness of all your sins, without anything you can do or earn to deserve those blessings as though they were your wages due. That's what grace means.

It does, for sure, require you to obtain a tremendous dose of humility, especially in our culture, to acknowledge that you are a sheep. The more you insist on your own

self-sufficiency and independence, the more you also reject dependence on Christ. Sheep in reality as well as in metaphorical comparisons are often ridiculed as being unthinking, undiscerning, gullible creatures. Sure, they may not have a heightened sense of avoiding dangerous situations when they are wandering off on their own. They can certainly get themselves very easily into a lot of trouble. But as a flock, sheep collectively are very discerning and very happy to place their full dependence and trust on their Shepherd.

Good sheep know well enough to stay with their Shepherd, and they also know they need to stay together with their fellow sheep. No one should go it alone. The Good Shepherd, Lord of the Church, set it up that way on purpose. One of the biggest misconceptions people have about belonging to a church is that they need to have their lives totally together, no problems, no hurts, no griefs, before they feel worthy to walk in the doors on Sunday morning. Nothing could be more contrary to the fact! If anyone should know what a basket case you are, it should be your fellow Christians—they are the same!

Listen to what Jesus says, literally translated: "I have come that they may have life, and so that they may have greater." That, I have to admit, is a difficult sentence to translate. The usual move is to make the adjective into an adverb, as in, "have life, and have it abundantly." But the word by itself is a little mysterious: greater. What is the greater life that you want? What are the greater things you think Jesus has in mind for you? Do you think you would know it when you see it? He has already made you a good sheep. He did not make a mistake. He gave you His Word to read, to hear, to pay

attention to, and to follow Him, so that you would recognize His genuine Voice of forgiveness and lasting peace, and flee the thief who comes only to steal, kill, destroy. Your abundant life, your greater gifts in Jesus Christ may look different from those of others, but you wouldn't go astray if you daily remember to trust in Him to do the opposite of the robber: to give, to enliven, to preserve you now and for eternity.

On this Good Shepherd Sunday, be the good sheep you already are and seek out Jesus the Door to the Father's love and mercy. Praise Him for calling you with His Voice of forgiveness and with sheep-like eagerness hasten to the fresh pastures of His soul-refreshing crucified, yet risen Body and Blood under the bread and wine. Drink deeply of the life enriching water of life that He has made like a fresh well bubbling up within you. May your head be anointed with the comforting and fragrant oil of resurrection peace so that when your Shepherd passes in front of you, you will be ready to follow Him, wherever He may lead, until you in your soon to be granted resurrected glory dwell in the Lord's house forever.

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.