



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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April 26, 2012
4th Sunday of Easter
Sermon Text: [John 10:11-18](#)
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Acts 20:28-32](#)
Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 23](#)
Second Lesson: [1 Peter 5:1-4](#)
Gospel Lesson: [John 10:11-18](#)

The Good Shepherd

Grace, mercy and peace are yours from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow redeemed:

The church I grew up in Hemlock, Michigan now has a new entry built on the front. But when I was growing up, you went up some steps from the outside. There's a little balcony there. You went in the door and you could either go up the steps to the church level or down the steps to the basement and you hung up your coat right there. But as you went up the steps to the church, there was a little alcove on the side. In that alcove, they had different flowers they would put there on the shelf for different times of the year. Above it, if you went up the steps, was Salman's painting of Jesus the Good Shepherd, the familiar one where you see Christ holding the lamb and you see all the sheep behind him. As a kid, I always loved that picture. Whenever we went up to church to practice singing or something like that, every time we went by it when I went into church, I would always look up at that. I think I did what a lot of Christians have always done. You picture yourself as that lamb within Jesus' arms. I think that's what the painting is designed to do... remind you that you are part of a bigger flock with all these sheep there, but you are the lamb that Christ is holding.

The picture always draws to mind the song that we sang tonight. It draws to mind John 10 where Jesus at length develops the Good Shepherd imagery and calls himself the Good Shepherd. He's our Good Shepherd, not as in *I had a good cup of coffee this morning and I've had better, but that was a good one*. He's not a Good Shepherd in that way. The word *good* there doesn't mean the way we use the word *good*. It means of a noble character, a beautiful character. It's much higher than how you and I use the word *good*. We are a nation of such superfluous praise. Everyone is the best ever after every performance in sports and things like that. The word *good* is just watered down.

Here Jesus is saying "I am the Good Shepherd, the Shepherd that is unlike any other shepherd, not a hired hand." He tells us he's the Good Shepherd because he lays down his life for the sheep. That sounds wonderful to our ears and that's a wonderful thing we praise our God for, but it's a surprising thing when you consider what Jesus says here. He says, "I am the Good Shepherd. I know my sheep." The word *know* there means to know by experience.

We just sang “Oft we are sheep that have strayed from God.” Sometimes we’ve done it in ways other where people could see how we strayed when God said “Do this, don’t do that,” and we’ve strayed in the other direction. You can see how I’ve done it and I can see how you’ve done it and other people can see it. Sometimes we just stray in our thoughts. We stray from our God again and again and again. He knows this. He knows us through and through. He knows us and what we are like. He knows we are never going to win a blue ribbon at the fair being the kind of sheep that we are. That’s just what we are. We aren’t prize sheep that makes him glad we’re in his flock because there’s something special about us. There’s nothing. We are sinners. We are sinners to the core. You put up a wet paint sign and we have to touch it. God puts up his Law, and we have to see what it’s going to be like on the other side of the Law. That’s who and what we are.

Our Good Shepherd says, “I’ll always take care of you.” We go through times in our life when we shake our fist at God, at least in our mind, and think “Where are you God? Why are you letting this happen to me?” The Shepherd knows this. He knows who and what we are. He knows us better than we know ourselves because we can lie to ourselves quite often. And it’s the other person’s fault when it’s really our fault. We can deceive ourselves. He knows us better than we know ourselves.

This is what makes it all the more remarkable that our Good Shepherd loves us. In reality, he gets nothing out of us. His glory is not enhanced because we are a part of his flock. His divinity is not enhanced because we are part of his kingdom. We can add nothing to what he has been from all eternity. Yet he stoops down and loves us even though he knows us. Even though he has watched us, even though it has pained him, even though it has agonizingly pained him every time you and I have strayed from him, he still knows us, he still loves us, and he still lays down his life for us. That’s why *good* just isn’t quite a good enough word for us today, is it?

He is a shepherd beyond anything we could imagine as a shepherd. He’s certainly not a hired hand. He doesn’t run away from the world. He took the world on. He took them on one on one for 33 years and fought every single temptation the world brought to his doorstep and met it perfectly because you and I don’t. He took every one of our sins that we have committed and he had them all piled on his back. All along you have to think Satan was right there saying “They aren’t worth this. Get down off the cross. What are you going through this for, for them? You know these sheep. They don’t smell so good. What are you doing this for?” Yet as the Good Shepherd, he kept doing it.

He had the authority to lay down his life and take it up again. He laid down his life so that he would make us sheep of his flock. That’s an amazing truth. If that ever ceases to thrill you, you have a you problem that you have to fix. That’s the most amazing truth in the world, that God, who is perfect, holy and divine, loved us so much that he became one of us and died for us and took away our sins and says, “It’s all me. I’ve

done everything. You now are part of my flock. You now are part of my kingdom. You now have the gates to heaven open to you. Even though I know you, you know me. You know who I am and what I've done for you. You know that you are forgiven."

That's why he says we listen to his voice because we know him. We know what a Good Shepherd he is. We know he's not a hired hand. We know he always has our best interests at heart even when the devil is screaming in our ear that he doesn't. We know this by faith. So we believe it. We rejoice in it. We live in it.

There are words in what I read to you from our Gospel from John that should also thrill you. He says there, "I've got other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. They have to become part of the flock too." That should thrill you and me because the sheep pen he was talking about that they were not a part of was the Jewish people. They were God's chosen people, but it was too small a thing as we heard in Lent for the Messiah only to save the Jewish people. He was going to have a flock that comes from all nations, from every tribe, language and people so that this multitude that will be in heaven with us could not be counted or numbered by anyone because the flock is just too large and too all encompassing.

He didn't come just for the Jews. He came for all people of all time. That includes us. Somewhere along the line, he used someone's voice to reach out to us and to bring us into the sheep pen. Now, he lays before us the opportunity to, I guess in a very real sense, be his voice. The Good Shepherd still longs to bring more and more people into the sheep pen, people that he died for, people that he paid for their sins and yet they don't believe in him. Now the voice that reaches out to them that is the voice of the Good Shepherd is spoken through our vocal chords. It's spoken through our actions. It's spoken through our attitudes. It's spoken through the love that we show to other people even when they attack us. It's shown through the love that we share by being willing to talk about our Savior with other people and say, "This is the most important thing in my life and I sure hope someday it is going to be the most important thing in your life." It makes all the difference in the world. It opens heaven.

God gives those opportunities to us. He lays them in front of us and he longs to have his voice be heard. It's spoken through you, and it's spoken through me. A lot of people out there will engage you because they just want to argue religion with you. Don't argue religion. Take everything back to the Good Shepherd and his love that led him to lay down his life for sheep that he knew were sinners and yet he still loved them, just like he loved us and like he loves the people that he will bring into your life that you have the opportunity to witness to.

The opportunities are around us everywhere. They come in places that we wouldn't expect and at times we wouldn't expect. Our Lord longs to bring more sheep into the flock. He longs to do it through you and through me. We'll be able to the better we know the voice of our Good Shepherd. The better we can recognize that voice, the better we can live that voice, and the more the Lord will bless us and work through us to bring more sheep into his fold. Amen.