



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

April 21, 2013

Easter 4

Sermon Text: [John 10:22-30](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Ezekiel 34:25-31](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 23](#)

Second Lesson: [Revelation 7:9-17](#)

Gospel Lesson: [John 10:22-30](#)

### Follow the Good Shepherd

Believe

Listen

In Christ our Good Shepherd, dear fellow redeemed:

I want you to think first of all about some of the words that Jesus spoke a little bit earlier in the Good Shepherd chapter and the whole Good Shepherd discourse. I don't know if you've read through [John 10](#) recently, but it's a beautiful chapter full of comfort and promise from our God. It's a beautiful chapter that also really goes over a lot of what we just celebrated a few weeks back in Holy Week and Easter. Jesus talked about it long before it happened.

There is one thing in that chapter that has always caught my attention. It's always stuck out to me and made me think and look at myself and say, "I guess at times I'm just not as smart as sheep." It's not something we really want to admit, that we're not as bright as four-legged creatures sometimes, right? But I can see it in what he says.

Jesus describes a picture at the start of [John 10](#) that the people of his day would have understood. The shepherds would have taken their sheep out to feed and to the pasture and to water and all those things like we sang in Psalm 23 earlier. But sometimes at night, they would bring them inside of a walled enclosure where all the different shepherds would have their sheep together to protect them from animals and things like that during the night. The next morning, from what I've read, the shepherd would go in and call out to the sheep. His sheep would come running, because they knew his voice and that voice meant food and protection and all that good stuff. But the sheep that weren't a part of that flock would go in the other direction, because that's not their shepherd's voice.

Jesus said that he was the Good Shepherd. He calls out to his own sheep by name and leads them out. He goes on ahead of them and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger. In fact, they'll run away from him because they don't recognize a stranger's voice. Then it says Jesus used this figure of speech, but they didn't get it. But you can see what he's saying, can't you? He is the Good Shepherd and the people that follow him as the Good Shepherd are going to always believe him and listen to his voice.

That whole idea that we should be sheep like those sheep in those enclosures and we should run away from voices that aren't the Good Shepherd's...think about how often we fail at that. Think of how often you and I listen to our own voice and convince ourselves that this is a good idea if we do this. "God might say it's bad, but I'm going to do it because I know it will be better for me. You just don't understand." We are really good at seeing that in someone else, but in ourselves, we can convince ourselves that sin is a good idea.

We don't run away from a voice that isn't our Good Shepherd's. In fact, sometimes we just embrace it and have a nice dialogue with it. We don't run away from false teachers at times because maybe we just don't know the voice of the Good Shepherd well enough. We get confused because we can't identify the true voice because we just don't know it well enough. So when it comes down to it, you and I are dumber than sheep.

This morning, let's think a little bit more about what it would mean for us if we want to be smarter sheep. What does it mean for us to follow the Good Shepherd? He identifies some things...the questions that came a little bit later, after the Good Shepherd discourse, very important questions, and people didn't believe the answer because they didn't believe in Jesus. If they don't believe in him, they're not going to follow him and they are not going to listen to him. But you and I who believe, who rejoice, who know what sinners we are and know that Jesus has taken them away, we have to ask ourselves...how well are we at listening?

The Good Shepherd discourse had finished right where I started reading to you from John. It says that the Feast of Dedication had arrived. The Feast of Dedication is not in the Old Testament. The Feast of Dedication is Judas Maccabees rededicating the temple after Antiochus Epiphanes had desecrated the temple. You're probably more familiar with it as Hanukkah. They were celebrating this. This was the most recent deliverance of God's people, and they had come to Jerusalem to celebrate.

Jesus was walking in Solomon's Colonnade. It was called Solomon's Colonnade because it was big and impressive and the people said "That must have been here when Solomon built it." It really wasn't. But that's what they called it. They were walking around in that. It says it was winter time, so it tells us John was writing to the people who didn't know the time of year and the weather in Israel all that well.

He gives them that setting, some things they might have had some familiarity with, and he tells them that as Jesus was in Solomon's Colonnade, the Jews gather around him saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly. No more talking in parables. I want just a plain answer. Are you the Christ? Yes or no." Jesus tells them, "The question has already been asked and answered. My miracles speak for me. The miracles I do are fulfillment of what Isaiah talked about. They are fulfillment of what other prophets talked about. My miracles speak for me that I am the One that was promised." That's what he is saying. "But you'll never accept it

because you don't believe me. You don't believe God's promises. You've rejected them out of hand because you think you know better." That's basically what it came down to.

They were not a part of the flock. They didn't recognize Jesus' voice. They didn't listen to that voice because they did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah. They wanted him to say he was the Messiah plainly probably just so that they could arrest him for blasphemy. Actually, at the end when he said, "I and the Father are one," they wanted to stone him right then and there because they said he was guilty of blasphemy. He was claiming to be God. They wanted to kill him right then, right there.

You can't follow Jesus as your Good Shepherd if you don't believe he is your Good Shepherd. That faith never comes from inside of us. It doesn't come from our ability, our knowledge or our insight. It comes as a gift of the Holy Spirit. You and I rejoice and believe what we celebrated during Holy Week and Easter. Jesus lived in our place, died in our place, took away all of our sins, and heaven is open to us, not because of who we are, but because of what he did. We don't believe that because it was passed down to us from our forefathers. We don't believe that because it was passed down to us from any human. We believe that because the Holy Spirit worked that faith in our hearts. The Holy Spirit might have worked through other people, but it's the Spirit's gift that enables us to believe that.

It's the Spirit's gift that leads us to see what we are and acknowledge what we are...sinners who don't deserve a Good Shepherd, sinners who don't deserve someone to lead us to quiet waters. We don't deserve all these promises from our God that God makes to us. There are some beautiful promises that I read to you today from Ezekiel. They apply to you. Did you take them to heart and think about what that means for you? Did you see the metaphors God is using? Did you take them to heart and say, "As I go out into my life this next week, I have a God who loves me that much and he is going to be with me." Did you take it to heart and believe it? Or did you just think, "Those are nice words. I don't really like that opening hymn. What's for lunch?" Did you take them to heart and believe them and listen to them, or did your mind wander every which way under the sun? We are sheep that love to stray, aren't we? That's who we are. That's what we are. That's what we do. We aren't the brightest bulbs on the Christmas tree. We aren't the whitest sheep in the flock. We aren't the best thing going. That's why it's amazing that our God loves us anyhow. It's absolutely incredible. Believe it. Don't explain it. Just believe it.

When you do believe it, it changes you. When you do believe that no one can snatch you out of the Father's hand, as Jesus said, when you do believe that heaven is yours as a gift of your heavenly Father, when you do believe all these things that Jesus said, these incredible promises that heaven can't be taken from you, the only way you can lose it is if you give it away, if you stop listening, if you get distracted, if you start listening to a different shepherd's voice which is not the Good Shepherd, which is no shepherd at all. It is so important that you continue to listen. Then you will never lose the blessings God has for you. But if you aren't listening, if you aren't focused on that

Savior, if you aren't paying attention to him, you can lose these blessings. You think any sheep around 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jerusalem in those hills ever got eaten by a wolf because they didn't listen to the shepherd's voice? Of course they did. I'm sure shepherds often found carcasses. If you don't want to be a carcass, and who really wants to be a carcass, then you need to listen to the Good Shepherd.

Think about what Jesus says. Know his voice so well. That's what he said earlier. Know that voice so well that when you hear something that's not that voice, you just turn tail and get away from it because it's not going to do you any good. Do you know the voice that well? Or do we stop at times at that's the way we've always done things?

I think we do that sometimes, don't we? We don't listen to the voice. We listen to how we heard the voice presented. We don't know what Scripture says. We don't dig into it as deep as we could or as much as we could. We are content to remain at the elementary teachings when our God has said, "Hey, you want to be blessed? Leave the elementary teachings behind and go onto solid food because solid food is for the mature." This is our God who was upset with some people once and through Paul he said, "You guys should be teaching other people, but instead, you have to have someone come back and teach you the basics all over again because you're not listening well enough."

Where are you at? Are you in the basics? Are you spiritually shopping in the world peas? Is everything mushed up for you? Is it just baby food yet, or have you moved on to solid food? Do you shop at spiritual steak? Do you dig in? Do you listen to the voice? Do you know it really, really well? Do you dig into the deep things of God, the whole time rejoicing at who your Savior is? That's what God has called us to do. He wants us to listen to his voice.

In fact, he tells us that we have a responsibility as Christians to know the Word so well that we can, as it says... "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that we are thoroughly equipped for every good work." He isn't speaking to pastors or called workers there. He's talking to every Christian. We are supposed to be using and knowing it so well that we can care for one another. That's God's plan.

God's plan is that he tends his flock. He tends his flock through some of his other sheep. We need to encourage one another, teach one another, admonish one another, love one another, pray for one another. This is his plan. When you put your head on the pillow at night and go to sleep, are you thrilled to know that there are other Christians that pray for you? Would that be a good thing, to know that?

This is one of the things I've found interesting...in your service folder today, there is a blue insert that describes the mission statement of our shepherding program. I still hear from people that they were talking to someone and they were saying, "I don't know why those people are coming to visit me. I go to church all the time. Why are they coming and talking to me?" If you want to know why they are coming to talk to you, it's

right on that blue sheet. The shepherds are seeking to help you listen to the Good Shepherd, to bring you a message from his voice that is written down on the handout they'll give you. But they are also there to encourage you, to love you, and to say "I want to pray for you. Is there anything in particular I could pray for?" I would think that as Christians we can trust one another well enough that we are happy that other people are praying for us and that they are willing to take the time to show their love for us. That's exactly what we are seeking to do. What a wonderful blessing it is that we have 35 people or so willing to do this. Not everyone has a shepherd yet, because we don't have enough shepherds. If everyone is interested, by all means, talk to me. We can train you and show you how to do it. But we're just basically asking people to be the face of Jesus' love. We are asking people to be the arms that...you know that painting by Warner Sallman of Jesus holding that lamb? We are asking people to be the arms of Jesus, to hold four families in your arms and love them and pray for them. What a great thing it is that we love each other and we want each other to be connected to our Good Shepherd.

*(Long silence...)*

Does the silence make you uncomfortable? Think of how uncomfortable God becomes when his voice is silent in your ears. He longs to speak to you to tell you of his love and his forgiveness and his purpose for you. Listen. Amen.