

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church  
Des Moines, Wash,  
April 25, 2010**

**John 10:22-30**

**The Good Shepherd and His Sheep**

- 1. True sheep listen and follow**
- 2. The Good Shepherd provides and protects?**

**Hymns: 153 – 375 – Closing: 160**

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

**John 10:22-30 –**

***Then came the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon's Colonnade. The Jews gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."***

***Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one."***

Have you ever been called a name? Maybe by an angry neighbor or co-worker? Or a driver? Perhaps someone called you a name back in your school days? Or for those of you still in your school days, perhaps this past week? Unfortunately, name-calling is all too common. Yet I have to call you a name today. Even though it's not nice to call people names and we're in church, I have to call you a name, you... sheep!

I'd imagine no one has ever called you that at work? Today, though, it's not just me who is calling you "sheep," but Jesus himself. It might interest you what English name has developed from the Hebrew word for "sheep." It's the name Rachel. The boy equivalent, which isn't really used much in our country anymore, is Ram. Today, all the females here can be called Rachels, and the males are Rams!

**Today we learn about:**

**The Good Shepherd and His Sheep**

- 1. True sheep listen and follow**
- 2. The Good Shepherd provides and protects**

**1 –** In John 10, we read, *"Then came the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon's Colonnade. The Jews gathered around him..."* Let's set the scene of these verses. This account follows a number of "run-ins" Jesus had with the Jewish leaders of his day. If we were to read the previous chapters we would read about how:

- Jesus said, *"I am the Light of the world,"* and had been challenged publicly by the Jewish leaders.
- Jesus told them after this that if they were not his children and his Father's children, they were children of the devil.
- Then he plainly told them that he was God ("I AM"), after which they picked up stones to stone him, but he escaped.
- Then he healed a man born blind on the Sabbath Day, and they accused him of doing "work" on the Sabbath.
- And at the beginning of John 10 Jesus told the people he was their Good Shepherd, to which the Jews responded that he was

raving mad and demon-possessed.

There had been many confrontations between Jesus and the Jewish leaders!

The time that the incident in our text occurred was not about two months after the last confrontation. We hear that it was now winter. Jesus was walking in a sheltered area of the Temple because of the season, and the Jews appear. It says they “gathered around him.” Literally, it says that they “encircled” him. Do you feel the tension of the moment? They have obviously discussed their plans for this preacher who has been making waves, and decided they wanted a showdown.

They ask, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.” The plan is obvious. Since the penalty for claiming to be God (blasphemy) was death, they wanted him to make this claim publicly and plainly so they could condemn him as worthy of death. They had their stones ready! It is a tension-filled moment. How would Jesus respond?

He says, “I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.” Jesus told them that his sheep believe him and follow him. After all, the witnesses as to whom he was had been clear. He had told them who he was. If we would go back and read previous chapters of John, we would see how this was true:

1. In John 6 Jesus told the people that he was the “Bread of Life,” the bread that came down from heaven.
2. In John 7 he said that he had “living water” that would quench eternal thirst, better than ordinary water.
3. In John 8 he told the Jewish leaders that before Abraham was born, “I AM,” a takeoff on the name of the Lord which God used

when he gave his name to Moses at the burning bush in the OT.

4. And finally, at the beginning of chapter 10 he said he was the Good Shepherd, a takeoff of Psalm 23, which was our Psalm of the Day.

These Old Testament scholars understood that picture well!

Jesus also told them the miracles he did should be a witness to them as to his identity, and that if they were truly his sheep they would know this. How true! He had healed a paralytic. He had fed 5,000 men with a little boy's lunch. He had healed a man born blind. They should figure it out! **But Jesus says that since they are not his sheep, they do not believe or follow him.**

They show this conclusively by their reaction. Just after our text, John continues, “Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him... They tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp.” **They were not his sheep!**

Here we are today, you sheep, years later. We can read these same words that the Jewish leaders heard Jesus say about himself. How will we react to his words?

First, we must understand some things about sheep's nature to truly ask ourselves this question today. Sheep are not bright animals. In fact, they are downright dense sometimes. I heard a pastor once talk about a sheep he saw that managed to get upside-down in the horse trough and was kicking! Sheep that are going to be sheared won't show any fear because they have no idea what's going on. This is not like our dog when I was growing up, who knew somehow when bath time was coming!

By nature, we sheep are spiritually dumb and blind. The Bible tells us that by ourselves we cannot understand or believe God's Word: “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2). We need the Holy Spirit in our hearts to believe

and follow! Pray for his guidance, for he will enlighten us to believe Jesus' words. His sheep submit their thinking to God's Word.

A positive side of sheep is that they do recognize the voice that has become familiar to them as their shepherd. What an encouragement this is for us to continue to recognize the familiar voice of our Savior in his Word and to hear it often. We will hear it when we read his Word, have devotions with our family, and worship in his house. This is a natural response of Jesus' true believers, who love to hear his voice. What a warning this is to those, even of our own flock, who choose to stay away from worship. Jesus said to these same Jews in John 8: "*He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.*" May we listen to the voice of our Good Shepherd each week!

A negative side of this, however, is that if a sheep is not hearing the shepherd's voice, he has a tendency to stray or to follow other leads. This may happen to a Christian, when he heard a voice tell him:

- "That command of God in the Bible is an old-fashioned one. It doesn't apply to our society today."
- "Everyone's doing it – Don't be weird!"
- "Rules were made to be broken."
- "Following the commands of the Bible takes all the fun out of life."

**Dear sheep, don't stray. Keep believing and following!**

Many people these days are quitting on a New Year's resolution they made. Many people in January said that this was the year they were going to get in shape. They were going to eat better, they were going to exercise more – THIS WOULD BE THE YEAR! But by now they have become pathetic at their resolution or have abandoned it altogether.

Don't do this as you follow your Shepherd.  
**True sheep listen and follow!**

2 – Up till now we have focused on the sheep. Does this all depend on us? Do we have to stake our eternity on our following skills and efforts? No, for Jesus goes on in our reading and has assurances from his side. The Good Shepherd has promises for us!

As we look at his promises, we need to understand a bit more about the nature of sheep. It's important to know that sheep cannot provide for their basic needs. They cannot find grass or water. But our Good Shepherd has some assurances about providing for us. In Psalm 23 we read, "*He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters.*" Our Good Shepherd tells us that he'll give us everything we need to live our lives. Perhaps many of us don't have to look back too far in our lives to see how God has provided for us richly with so many things.

He has an even better provision for you. Psalm 23 continues, "*He restores my soul. He guides me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*" Or more simply put in our text, "*I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish.*" Jesus the Good Shepherd gives us eternal life! This is an even better blessing than our daily bread.

This is no easy promise for him to make, because as sheep, we have enemies. Remember the authentic enemies of sheep that David mentioned in the Old Testament when he described how he had to provide life for his sheep: "*David said to Saul, 'Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear.'*" (1 Samuel 17:34-36)

As God's sheep, we also have fierce enemies. Our enemies are the devil and his force of demons that want your soul! How comforting to know that Jesus broke their power with his death on the cross and his resurrection. He didn't run away when the

forces of darkness threatened us, but loved us enough to take them on and defeat them, assuring us our forgiveness and a place in heaven one day.

But the promises don't stop there. After all, you aren't in heaven yet. What about our lives until the Good Shepherd returns to take his flock to their final destination? He has promises about that too!

Jesus promises protection for his sheep. Did you know that sheep, by nature, are virtually helpless to defend themselves? They don't have sharp hooves, big teeth, or even the instinct to hide. They have poor eyesight, can't run very fast, and can't get up if they get in the wrong position on their backs. How pathetic! In the same way, as we walk through life, we need protection. We need strength to get through this next week. We need someone to help keep our faith strong. This person is our Good Shepherd, Jesus! Jesus says, "*No one can snatch them out of my hand.*"

If you walk through the streets of a large, busy city and are carrying a purse over your shoulder, you'd better have a hand on it! If you don't have a grip on some part of the strap some evil person may come by and unexpectedly grab the purse off your shoulder and start running. This is the meaning of the word Jesus uses for "snatch" here. To "take by force." Nobody has the power to forcibly take you away from Jesus. It is not possible. No one is stronger. You may have the power to wander off yourself and lose your faith, but no power of darkness will snatch you away!

Jesus has one more assurance for us. What if we are still fearful? *Jesus says, "My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one."* God the Father is holding you too!

It's possible to fool the authorities of this world, at least for a while, but nobody can fool God the Father. He is always watching over us. He will never let anyone take us from his hand. We have nothing to fear. As Psalm 23 tells us: "*Even though I walk through the*

*valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*"

As we close today, I was reminded this past week of the story of a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade girl who was going to recite the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm for her school entertainment night. It was her "poetry reading." She practiced and practiced until she thought she knew it well. Finally her big night came! The stage lights were on, the people were there, and it came time for her reading. She came out, cleared her throat, and said, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want..." and she stopped, thinking hard. She started again: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want..." and stopped again. She tried one more time: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want... and that's enough for now!" she finished and walked off the stage.

That may have been an embarrassing moment, but she revealed a truth for all of us. When Jesus tells us he is our Good Shepherd, that is all we really need to know now. He calls to us, he leads us, he protects us, he gives us eternal life. May we listen to his voice and follow him. And may we always love the one who loved us first! Amen.