

**The Lord is our Shepherd who knows each one of us personally because he redeemed us and continues to watch over us. Amen.**

<sup>11</sup>“I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup>The hired man, who is not a shepherd, does not own the sheep. He sees the wolf coming, leaves the sheep, and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the sheep and scatters them. <sup>13</sup>Because he works for money, he does not care about the sheep.

<sup>14</sup>“I am the Good Shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me <sup>15</sup>(just as the Father knows me and I know the Father). And I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup>I also have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. Then there will be one flock and one shepherd. <sup>17</sup>This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life so that I may take it up again. <sup>18</sup>No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have the authority to lay it down, and I have the authority to take it up again. This is the commission I received from my Father.” **This is God’s Word.**

**Dear Fellow Lambs of God’s Flock,**

If you had a flock of sheep and you lived in a somewhat remote area and had to leave them alone for a few weeks out in the pasture, do you think they would all be there when you returned? Chances are that once some predators – whether that be wolves or coyotes or bears – found the sheep alone and unguarded they would attack and decimate the flock. Sheep have no way to defend themselves and so they need a shepherd to constantly watch out for them – to protect them and to guide them to food and water.

In the portion of scripture before us, Jesus compares believers to sheep but he does that with a purpose. As sheep he wants to assure us that, **“We are Safe in His Arms,”** We are safe in his arms because, **“He is the Good Shepherd,”** and because, **“We are the Sheep of His Flock.”**

**I.** The events before us took place in Jerusalem in the fall; probably about 6 months before Jesus would go to the cross to pay for our sins. This is the last year of Jesus public ministry and is what we call, “The Year of Opposition,” because the Pharisees and church leaders are becoming bolder in their attacks on Jesus. Jesus likens these attacks to a band of wolves circling the sheep as they look for any kind of weakness.

I often wonder what the disciples thought about this sermon that Jesus was preaching. Did they really understand what he was saying? Three different times Jesus takes us to the cross as he talks about laying down his life for the sheep, yet it is easier to set that aside and focus on his role as our Good Shepherd, even though the two are very connected.

So what did Jesus mean when he said, **“I am the Good Shepherd?”** What do we mean when we use the word good? We use the word “good” in a number of different ways. I’m looking forward to the potluck after the voters’ meeting this morning because the food is always good. Or my Catechism Students are always trying to get a good grade. Using good in that context is really subjective because it all depends on my definition of good and it might be quite a bit different than yours. But as Jesus said, **“I am the Good Shepherd,”** he used a word that means

he is the most excellent shepherd, excelling in every area beyond every expectation. There is no shepherd that is able to match his ability as our Good Shepherd.

Jesus explains why he is our most excellent shepherd by telling us that, **“The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”** Most shepherds will fight for their flock to defend them and may even risk injury but they would stop short of giving up their life – not Jesus. He does it because, **“This is the commission I received from my Father.”** This is why he came into the world – to give his life for our sins. This was his Father’s will but he did it willingly. Jesus put it this way, **“<sup>17</sup>This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life so that I may take it up again. <sup>18</sup>No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have the authority to lay it down, and I have the authority to take it up again.”**

When Jesus was arrested he told how he could have called on legions of angels to defend him but he didn’t. When he was before Pilate, the governor proclaimed that he held the power of life or death for Jesus and Jesus explained that it was God who gave him that power and that God was going to use these events for his own purpose – to bring us forgiveness for our sins, life and salvation. As our Good Shepherd, Jesus came into this world for us – he came willingly and gave his life lovingly for each and every one of us.

A shepherd knows his sheep well and as Jesus stated his love for us a second time he pointed out that he knows us. We are not just another name to be checked off of a list but our Savior knows each one of us personally. He knows us because he has suffered for each one of our sins. He knows us because he has heard our confession and personally assures us that we are forgiven. He knows us and has numbered each one of the hairs on our head. He knows our sorrows and our joys. He knows our strengths and our weaknesses. He knows what’s in our hearts and he knows when and why we might be hurting. He knows us better than we know ourselves because he has redeemed us and made us one of his own and this brings us great comfort.

A little boy undergoing chemotherapy treatments went to visit his grandmother for the first time since the treatments began. He had lost all his hair due to the therapy. He kept his favorite baseball hat on most of the time to look more like everyone else. As they walked up to grandmother’s door, his dad gave him his hat. The little boy smiled and said, “No thanks, Dad; I know that Grandma knows me and will love me just the way I am!” That’s the kind of love that Jesus has for us, His sheep – for us whom he knows personally and yet he still loves us as his own.

He cares about us, speaks to us, loves us and forgives us. And not only does he know us but we know him too.

**II.** Jesus said, **“I am the Good Shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me.”** We know him because we have experienced his grace and mercy and love. We know him because he has revealed himself to us through his Word. We know him because he continues to speak to us through his Word and in this way he comforts us and assures us that we are not alone. Through his Word he brings us forgiveness for our sins and helps us to identify those temptations that would take us down a dangerous path away from him. As he speaks to us, he guides us in our lives. We know him because he is an important part of our lives and has changed our lives forever.

Sometimes we may wander from the flock and the wolves may attack but our Good Shepherd protects us, binds up our wounds and brings us healing through his word. That is why God sent his Son into this world – to be our Good Shepherd and to give his life for us.

He willingly lay his life down for us and took it up again. He has gathered us into his fold through Word and sacrament. We can feel safe in his care because he is watching over us. He has defeated our enemies. Never forget that You are part of his flock so don't let the wolves of this world scatter you, but rather remain close to your good Shepherd as he continues to watch over you and guide you through life. Amen.