

Sermon for Easter 3 – John 10:11-16

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

“I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.” Dictionary [dot] com lists 41 ways that the word “good” can be used as an adjective in the English language. As we know, the word “good” is so common that its meaning demands a context. And even after knowing the context, how often do we ask, when told something is good, “Well, what does that mean?” Not all of definitions of the word “good” can be used in the sense that we call Jesus the “Good” Shepherd. By my estimation, a little less than half of the 41 uses can be applied to our Lord as the Good Shepherd. But, of course, our Lord didn’t say in English, “I am the Good Shepherd.”

He probably spoke in Aramaic or possibly in Hebrew. It’s remotely possible that he spoke in Greek. In one sense, it doesn’t really matter what language He spoke it in the first time. The Holy Spirit has given it to us, through the apostle John, in the Greek language. And what the Holy Spirit gives is authoritative. So what does this mean? You get to learn a Greek word today. The word in John 10, so often translated “good,” is the Greek word *kalos*. Jesus is the *kalos* Shepherd.

Now, the word *kalos* is not interchangeable with definitions of “good” like “sufficient,” or “satisfactory,” or “good enough.” Rather, there comes with *kalos* synonyms like “noble” and “honorable,” though never without humility. The context of today’s Gospel lends itself well to these definitions. “I am the *kalos* Shepherd. The *kalos* Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.” The goodness of this Shepherd doesn’t rest in His warm and fuzzy feelings for the sheep. He doesn’t just do the fun parts of being a shepherd. He doesn’t just pet and cuddle the sheep. He doesn’t run His fingers through their wool for His own amusement. He doesn’t derive pleasure from them for His own benefit. He is the *kalos* Shepherd.

But to be fair, the Lord does hold a deep affection for all of us. He loves us in the specific ways we need to be loved. He loves us as a father loves his children. He loves us as a husband loves his wife, and even more so, as He loves purely with a love free of self-interest, free of jealousy, and free of fear.

And this love is always rooted in action. This Shepherd dies for sinners, for us. That’s what ultimately makes Him Good. The *kalos* Shepherd is the uniquely qualified and the best Shepherd for sinners. He is good, right, fitting, competent, and worthy of praise. He is “good” in the sense of morality. He is morally perfect and without sin. But His claim is not from morality, but from being a faithfully obedient sacrifice. The Good Shepherd is the true shepherd because He gives His life for the flock, for us. We are bought with the price of His Blood.

Christ proclaims Himself to be the Good Shepherd, the *kalos* Shepherd, to deny all other hireling shepherds that would stake their claim upon men’s souls. He stands against the hireling gods of the Romans and other pagans, against the Pharisees and scribes, and even against the American gods of prosperity and instant pleasure. To

some degree we've all bought into the lies of these gods. We've all been seduced away from the *kalos* Shepherd. We've sought their empty entertainment and their vain amusement. We've all been handled by the hirelings who coax us down paths of destruction. Have we not listened to their deceitful voices which urge us to "go ahead and do it, everyone else does," and "no one will find out about it, what harm can there be?" and "you can have it all in this life, because you're worth it."? We've partaken of the hirelings' rank fodder. We've grazed in their poisoned fields. We've sinned. We've strayed from the Good Shepherd's hands.

So what now? The *kalos* Shepherd proves why He's the *kalos* Shepherd. He did something to rescue you, His sheep. The Good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep. God laid the iniquity of us all on Him. He bore our sins upon the tree. But it doesn't stop there. The invisible Savior created a visible church. This church is His tool, His voice, His hands. He continues His work forgiving sinners in this place. The church is the body of Christ on earth, where the living gospel is preserved and proclaimed for us, where Christ's sacraments are administered for sinners like us. Here we are forgiven in the name of Jesus. Here we find the strength to live for Him.

In the church, the one Good Shepherd gathers us to be one flock. The great hope and expectation of the rabbis who taught in the years before Christ was that the Messiah would unite all the Jews in Palestine, all the Jews who were dispersed through the various exiles, and all the Gentiles into one flock. These rabbis taught the Messiah would destroy the temple and usher in new age with no separation between Jew and Gentile. This, in a large part, is why the rulers of the Jews feared Jesus. They weren't afraid that He was a fraud. They were afraid that He really was the Messiah. They didn't want the Gentiles. They didn't want the end of the temple. They didn't want to stop worshipping the hireling gods. They didn't want the Messiah.

But fortunately for us, the Good Shepherd loves us too much to give us what we want. Instead, He gives us what we need for this world and the next: the very bread from heaven, the Bread of Life. He Himself is the living Bread, which came down from heaven to give life to the world, to give life to us. We need no spiritual junk food, you and I. We need the lasting Food that endures to eternal life. We need the *kalos* Shepherd, for He alone has the words of eternal life. He took those words, joined them with water, and made them the forgiveness of sins in Holy Baptism for you. He takes those words of eternal life, joins them to His Body and Blood, and offers them to us to eat and drink under bread and wine.

Again, the goodness of our *kalos* Shepherd is not chiefly in His affection toward us, but in His sacrifice for us. This takes the focus off us and puts it back where it belongs: on Him. He lays down His life. He takes it up again. We are the sheep of a different fold, bought with His Blood and taken in without pedigree or works. We are spared from the hired hands. The Shepherd continually redeems and forgives you, His sheep. He is good. He is *kalos*. And ... He is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia! Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠