

“Good Shepherd”, John 10:11-18 (04/25/21)

(Slide 1) It’s a long time ago now but I can still vividly remember one moment from the first day of my senior year in high school. My homeroom teacher introduced herself and made her very first roll call. She called each student’s name without looking at the attendance book. At that time there were 35 students in my class, and she remembered all of our names even before she met us in person. We all were very surprised and impressed by her love and care for her students. Indeed, remembering a person’s name and calling them by name is very special, because it takes more time and effort to make it happen, but it can be the very first step to get to know each other and build a relationship. Therefore, when Ran and I got a new appointment to serve a new church, we made a great effort to remember all the names of the church families, as many as we can and as fast as possible. **(Slide 2)** So, we looked at the church directory again and again even before we moved in. Also, a late thank you to all, you put on nametags for a while, so it was very helpful for helping me to remember each person by name when I started my ministry at BUMC.

(Slide 3) Today’s Bible lessons remind us of a very familiar image of our Lord, Jesus Christ, which is the “good shepherd.” Since I started my ministry, I have been officiating so many funeral services. Whenever I am asked to lead a funeral, I ask family members to choose some favorite bible verses of the deceased to read during the service. Then, there is one thing that I am often requested to include is “Psalm 23”, starting with “The Lord is my shepherd.” I think the reason why people may love Psalm 23 is that people want to still be loved and cared for by God even during the most difficult times in their life. And they believe that this God will lead them to green pastures in the end.

(Slide 4) Today’s gospel scripture, John chapter 10 said that our Lord is not just a shepherd, but the good shepherd, who lays down his life for us – the sheep. He is totally different from the hired hand who leaves the sheep and runs away when the wolves come. The comparison

of the Lord, Jesus Christ to a shepherd reminds us of his guidance, leading his sheep to the place of water and grass. Furthermore, it also reminds us of the relationship between Jesus and us – he is a shepherd, and we are his sheep. Actually, the sheep is a very interesting animal. Sheep have poor eyesight, they have no sense of direction, they have poor balance, and even they are very slow and easily fall down, so they are very defenseless. You may think that you are very much different from sheep, because you think you have good eyesight, good sense of direction, good balance, and have good defensive power too.

However, imagine your life without Jesus. Without Jesus, we all are very much like a sheep. We have very poor eyesight, so we don't see Jesus Christ and his presence with us in our daily life. We have no sense of direction, so we don't really know where our life is going. We have poor balance, so we often get confused and stumble around. We are vulnerable, depressed, feeling isolated, and lonely, so we easily fall down and wander around in the dark. Therefore, we need Jesus Christ, who is our good shepherd, taking care of us and leading us with steadfast love.

(Slide 5) The comparison of God to a shepherd is often found in the Old Testament; Psalm 80:1 “Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock!” Isaiah 40:11 “He will feed his flock like a shepherd,” Ezekiel 34:12 “As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep.” And this image of a shepherd is developed into a good shepherd in the New Testament.

In today's gospel scripture, Jesus describes himself as the good shepherd. In Greek, there are two words for “good.” The first one is *agathos*, which simply describes the moral quality of a thing. The second one is *kalos*, which means that in the goodness there is a certain charm which makes it lovely. And when Jesus describes himself as the good shepherd, it means *kalos*. He is definitely far more than having a good moral quality, there is loveliness in Jesus Christ.

(Slide 6) “I am the good shepherd” is a very simple statement, but it has a very powerful meaning. First, in verse 11, Jesus said “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” Right, our good shepherd never saves his life for himself, rather he is the one who even lays down his life for us. The true shepherd never hesitated to risk. For the shepherd, it is the most natural thing to risk his life to protect his flock. And even, the shepherd should be ready to lay down his life for his sheep. This is only possible, when the shepherd takes this job as calling. If the shepherd came into this job not as a calling but as a means of making money, he would not take enough dares for the sheep.

Secondly, in verse 14-15, Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father.” Right, our good shepherd is the one who knows each one of us thoroughly. We need to understand the word “know” in a deeper way. For the Greeks, knowing is considered to pretty much be the same as seeing, so in the religious sphere, for them, knowing God means recognizing the existence of God. However, for the Hebrews, knowing is more than just seeing, it is more like experiencing. Therefore, for the Hebrews in the religious sphere, knowing God means entering into the relationship with God. And this relationship is very special, remember what Jesus said: “just as the Father knows me and I know the Father.” Since he is our good shepherd, our Lord knows us and wants to have a deeper relationship with us, like as the one between God and Jesus.

Our Lord, Jesus Christ is the shepherd, and we are his sheep. As Isaiah 53:6 said, although we are “Like sheep we had all wandered away, each going its own way,” our good shepherd Jesus Christ never lets us be alone or go astray. As a shepherd finds the lost sheep and guides them back home, Jesus came to us to lead us to our real home. As the sheep learn how to rely on and be guided well by their shepherd, we need to learn how to rely on and be guided well by Jesus Christ. Our good shepherd not only leads us to green pastures and still waters, but also as Isaiah 40:11 said, “he will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will

gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.”

(Slide 7) Wherever we are at, whatever we are doing, Jesus is always walking with us by holding us, empowering us, and guiding us. He clearly said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.” He not just shows us the way, but also leads us to stand on this way and walks along with us all the way. Remember, “Emmanuel” which means God is with us. Even though sometimes we walk through the darkest valley in our life, our good shepherd is with us, leading us and guiding us with his steadfast love. Know who is our shepherd. Our Lord is our good shepherd, and he knows us thoroughly and even lays down his life for us. Let us follow him. Praise God. Amen.