

Sermon for April 17, 2016 – Easter 4: Good Shepherd Sunday

John 10:22–30 (ESV)

Theme: I am Jesus' Little Lamb.

- 1) I follow him because I belong to Him.
- 3) No one can snatch me from His hand.

²² At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³ and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon. ²⁴ So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." ²⁵ Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one."

My uncle raises sheep. Whenever he calls out over the pasture: "Here, lamby, lamby" the whole flock comes running. Now why do you think that is? Is it because my uncle is some kind of "sheep whisperer" whom all sheep love? No, because if he tried to call someone else's sheep, they wouldn't come. The reason his sheep come to him when he calls is because they belong to him and trust him.

Have any of you adopted a rescue animal as a pet? It can take a long time for such an animal to grow to trust you. My brother has two dogs that he adopted from the humane society at around the same time. One of the dogs loves him. The other dog is still scared of him and all men in general. Why is that? We think it's because she suffered abuse from some man in his past.

What can be said about pets can also be said about people and their relationship to Jesus. Those who don't know or belong to Jesus are naturally scared of him and refuse to come when he calls. However, those who do know and belong to Jesus come running when he calls. They love him because they know that they are loved by him. They find protection and peace in his arms. Let us consider these things under the theme: **I am Jesus' Little Lamb.** *1) I follow him because I belong to Him. 2) No one can snatch me from His hand.*

Part One: I follow him because I belong to Him.

Our sermon text took place during *the Feast of Dedication* – a Jewish winter holiday that we know by the name "Hanukkah." Jesus was walking in a covered open space of the temple complex known as "Solomon's Colonnade". Believers would often gather there for instruction and worship.

As Jesus was walking along, a group of Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.”

Who were these Jews? Were they believers who just needed Jesus to confirm what they already suspected about him? Sadly, no. These Jews were people who didn’t trust him. They saw Jesus as their enemy and wanted to make sure they understood his claims correctly so they could deal with him appropriately.

Now think about it for a second: if Jesus were simply to answer their question “are you the Christ” with a “Yup, you betcha,” do you think those Jews would have automatically believed in him? No, absolutely not. Truth be told, they probably would have accused him of blasphemy and tried to kill him on the spot. It’s easy for anyone to make claims about themselves. The hard part is backing those claims up with evidence. Jesus knew that. This is why he almost never claimed to be the Messiah. Rather, he let his teachings and works speak for themselves.

²⁵ *Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about me . . .*

The fact that the Jews even asked Jesus the question shows that the evidence was crystal clear. His miracles, teaching and compassion – all of it fulfilled what Scripture prophesied about the Messiah. The fact that these Jews could not find a single crime nor sin with which to charge him should have given them pause.

“*But,*” Jesus continued, “*you do not believe because you are not among my sheep.*” The problem was not a lack of evidence, but a lack of faith. Those Jews were sheep of a different shepherd: the devil. They ate his lies and drank his flattery. Like mad dogs of a cruel master, they barked at Jesus and wanted to attack him. They refused to be calmed by his gentle words and kind actions. They didn’t belong to Jesus and therefore wouldn’t believe in him.

Sadly, like those Jews, many people in the world refuse to come to Jesus when he lovingly calls out to them through the Gospel. Why is that? Because they belong to a different master. And just as it is hard for an animal to change masters, so it is hard for a person to change gods. If a person spent his whole life loving sinful pleasure, it will be hard for him to listen to Jesus who calls him to forsake it. If a person grew up believing in Allah, it will be nearly impossible for him to turn to Jesus as his LORD and Savior.

So does this mean all our mission efforts are useless? I mean, if people who don’t belong to Jesus won’t follow him, what’s the point in spending all our money and effort in trying to reach them? The answer to that question can be found in a statement Jesus made on another occasion: “*What is impossible with man is possible with God*” (Luke 18:27 ESV). God’s Word is powerful and active. It can and does do the impossible: it changes hearts. On top of this, Jesus says that there are many “lost sheep” in the world – people who are wandering from master to master – that actually belong to him. Just as a stray dog, after receiving a lot of love and patient care, can become someone’s loyal pet, so also the lost people of this world can become Jesus’ sheep.

But what about us? Do we belong to Jesus? Well, in answer to that question, let me ask you a different one: Why did you come to worship this morning? Was it because you love Jesus and want to learn more about him? If so, then rejoice because you belong to Christ.

Jesus says: ²⁷ *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.* When Jesus calls us to come to him, we come running. Why? Because Jesus knows us; and we know him. Like the rest of humanity, we were once stray sheep - lost in the wilderness of this world. He saw that we were in mortal danger and set out to defeat our enemy. Jesus laid down his life to win our forgiveness. He rose again to show that we've been reconciled to God. After winning our salvation, he then went out to search for his scattered sheep. Through the proclamation of his Gospel, he called out to us, found us, and enticed us to follow him. For some of us this happened at a very early age. For others it happened later in life. He healed our wounds that sin had caused. He fed us with his Word and refreshed us with his Sacraments. Ever-loving Jesus won our hearts. He adopted us as his own. We belong to him.

And so – just like sheep love being with their shepherd – we love being with Jesus. We run to him when he calls. And as we stay close to his side, no one can snatch us from his hand.

Part Two: No one can snatch me from His hand.

²⁷ *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.* ²⁸ *I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.* ²⁹ *My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.* ³⁰ *I and the Father are one.*”

If there was any doubt as to who Jesus claimed to be, he dispelled it with the statement: “*I and the Father are one.*” Jesus is the Son of God – our promised Savior from sin. He is our Good Shepherd in whom we trust. With him at our side, we need not be afraid.

The wilderness that surrounded Jerusalem was a dangerous place for sheep. Wild animals were on the prowl –looking for a sheep to devour. Thieves were constantly looking for ways to either entice or force sheep to come with them. The land was harsh and sun hot. There were so many dangers for the sheep, but when they remained close to their shepherd, they were safe.

Like the Judean wilderness, there are many dangers threatening our soul. The devil is constantly on the prowl, looking for ways to devour us. The world is ever trying to entice us away from following Jesus. And if enticement doesn't work, then it shames Christians for their beliefs - calling them unloving, hypocritical, bigoted and the like. And if shaming doesn't work, then it uses boycotts, lawsuits and, in some places on this globe, physical force to try to tear us away from our Savior. Is it any wonder that a Psalmist once wrote: “*For your sake we are killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.*”? (Psalm 44:22 ESV)

What are we to do with some many dangers surrounding us? Do what any good sheep would do: stay close to your Good Shepherd. Jesus knows the dangers that threaten us. He knows that we can't make it through life alone. This is why he not only leads us through life, he often carries

us. *“They will never perish,”* Jesus says, *“and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”* Oh, the devil and world will try, but as we stay close to Jesus they will all fail, for, as St Paul writes, *“in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* (Romans 8:37-39 ESV)

We belong to Jesus. No one can snatch us from his hand. Oh, what joy these truths give us. Jesus is always watching over us. He gives us eternal life. Because of this I can be sure that *the Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom.* (2 Timothy 4:18 ESV) You can be absolutely sure of this too, as you remain close to Jesus.

Yes, the only real danger we are in is when we stray from Jesus and his Word. Just as a sheep loses its protection when it runs away from its shepherd, so we lose our protection when we try to sneak away from Jesus to pursue the foolish lusts of our hearts. That’s the only time we’re really at risk. Worse than that, the more we wander away from our Shepherd, the more estranged we become from him. An animal that continually stays away from its master shows it really doesn’t want to belong to him. So we too, if we continually avoid Jesus and refuse to come when he calls, show that we don’t really want to belong to Jesus. Another master has won our heart – the same master that possesses the world: Satan himself. Sure, he might offer all sorts of tasty treats to lead people away from Christ, but understand that he is just fattening his sheep up for the slaughter. He is not a good master.

And so, dear brothers and sisters in Christ: do not delay when you hear your Good Shepherd call to you. Run to Him. Listen to Him. Follow Him. Rejoice in the fact that, through faith, you are Jesus’ little Lamb. He made you his own when he put his name on you at your Baptism. No one can snatch you from his hand. Remain at his side, therefore, and he will guide you through the valley of the shadow of death, and bring you safely home to himself in heaven. Amen.