

**A Message From Our Good Shepherd**  
**Sermon on John 10: 1-10**  
**Saint Mark's, Watertown, WI**  
**Pastor Karl Walther**  
**May 7, 2006**

**Introduction: We Are Dependent on Our Good Shepherd Jesus Christ**

With David we say, especially today: *The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want*—ever! Amen.

Dear fellow Christians—fellow sheep-like followers of our Good Shepherd Jesus Christ:

Which one of us doesn't like to consider himself mature? Which one of us doesn't like to consider himself independent? Which one of us doesn't like to think of himself as his own man, or to think of herself as her own woman—taking care of his or her own business?

Well, we all like to think that way, don't we? And I'm not saying that's all bad. Those attitudes have their place—if they're derived from Jesus Christ.

But fundamentally, they're not true, are they? We are dependent creatures, we are immature, and we cannot take care of our own business. Sin threatens, and we cannot conquer it. Death hangs over us, and we cannot triumph. Hell menaces us, and we cannot rescue ourselves. Why, those of us who work can't even guarantee we'll have a job: next year—or even tomorrow. Those of us who have a family cannot even guarantee their survival—let alone their flourishing. And those of us without a family yet cannot guarantee we'll ever have one.

We are very dependent creatures. We desperately need someone upon whom we can always depend. Good Shepherd Sunday reminds us that – thank God! – we've got exactly such a person: always and forever.

**Exposition: A Message From Our Good Shepherd**

God's Word to us today is John, chapter ten, verses one through ten. It has Jesus teaching: probably in Jerusalem, probably just some months before his death and resurrection on our behalf, in that same city.

In his teaching on this day, Jesus compares his relationship to us to the relationship between a shepherd and his sheep. What I intend to do is to read this part of Scripture, tell you some things about shepherds and sheep along the way, and then consider with you what it all means to us.

In fact, even before I read God's Word to you, I had better start by telling you some things about the sheep trade in Israel back at the time of Jesus. Among the many occupations that would have been familiar to the people of Jesus' time was the job of shepherd. It was a time-honored occupation. No less than Abraham, Moses, David, and many other notables from the Old Testament had served some time as shepherds.

Sheep were rather valuable animals at Jesus' time. Some of them were necessary for slaughter in the temple in Jerusalem. Many more were necessary for the sake of their wool. We get our clothes from the store; they're shipped over to us from other countries; they're manufactured from man-made materials. We probably tend to forget that at Jesus' time lots of clothes and coverings were made from the wool of sheep.

So, what did a shepherd need to do for his sheep? Well, these weren't the type of animals you kept in a barn and brought food and water to. No, sheep were the sorts of animals who fed on grass in the pasture lands. A shepherd led them to what water they

needed. And as valuable as sheep were to their owners, they were also valuable to predators. So, the shepherds had an important job protecting their sheep at all times.

Nevertheless, at night a shepherd did keep his sheep in a shelter—in a safe area enclosed by walls. You can imagine it took some effort to construct and maintain such a pen. You'd need a big enough area for a flock. It would probably need to be fairly level. You'd need strong walls, high enough to keep predators out. That would probably require gathering a lot of stones. And you'd need a gate. And you'd need a gatekeeper, a watchman of some sort.

It's not hard to imagine that once you had constructed such a shelter, it would be a valuable commodity for more than a single shepherd with his flock. So, many shepherds and many flocks would use such a pen simultaneously. That means that sheep had to recognize their own shepherd's voice when he called them to go in and out of the pen. It also made the shepherd's custom of nick-naming his sheep a valuable tradition; he could call them in and out by name.

Well, it's in that context that Jesus says—and finally, this is our text: **"I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them.**

It's sort of obvious, isn't it? Jesus is identifying himself as that Good Shepherd for his sheep. But before he states that in so many words, in an interesting twist, Jesus identifies himself as a different part of the picture here. **Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."**

Now, think of what we just read.... There are probably three main characters in what Jesus has said so far. There's the thief. There's the shepherd. And there are the sheep. And when you think of it, the thief is a warning to us, the shepherd is a comfort to us, and what the sheep do sort of directs us in our lives.

### **Application One: We Sheep Are Vulnerable to the Chief Thief**

So, first of all, consider the thief here. What a reprehensible guy! He could have developed his own flock. Alternately, he could have hired himself out to help some sheep owner or shepherd. But no: he waits until darkness and steals sheep that he didn't raise. And he probably damages them. And they maybe even end up killed, because then the evidence disappears. What an awful criminal!

And what a threat to the sheep! Suppose you're one of those sheep. You've had a nice day out in the pasture. You're in your shelter. You're sleeping soundly. And some stranger starts grabbing you. He wrestles you into his grasp. He roughly carries you to the wall. He throws you over it. You injure yourself. He hurries you away. And either he throws you into another flock, or he slaughters you.

And that is exactly what Satan wants to do to us. He's got all sorts of ways to do it, and he's got all sorts of helpers to accomplish it. He wants to catch us sleeping and to throw us over the wall into a foreign flock, any foreign flock, where we're never safe again. He wants to injure us by robbing from us the joy of serving our Savior: with our

money, or with our kind words to others, or with our purity toward matrimony, or with our kind actions to others, or with our obedience to every authority over us.

Finally, he wants to shear us, and slaughter us, and butcher us. And there's nothing we can do about it. We are, after all, only sheep.

### **Application Two: Jesus Is Our Gate & Our Shepherd**

But there is something somebody can do for us. And that brings us to the next character: the shepherd. What a remarkable guy! Here he is. He doesn't have the status of the owner of the sheep. And yet he has made himself entirely answerable for their welfare. He's willing to spend long days leading them to food. He's willing to take long trips with them to find water for them. He's willing to wake up in the middle of the night to defeat any threat to them. In fact, he's willing to risk his life for the sheep. Amazing, isn't it?

And what a comfort to the sheep! Suppose you're one of those sheep. You can trust your shepherd: you'll always be fed. You can trust your shepherd: you'll always have water. You can trust your shepherd: you'll always have shelter. You can trust your shepherd: you'll always be protected.

And that is precisely what our Good Shepherd Jesus Christ does for us! Doesn't he always feed us? He even feeds us with his perfect righteousness; we are right in God's sight because of Jesus! Doesn't he always water us? Jesus even washes away our sinfulness; he makes us fit for heaven itself! Doesn't he always shelter us? Doesn't he always protect us? Yes! And it's not just here, it's also hereafter. Jesus has promised us: there is no dread threat that Satan poses us that he is not powerful enough and loving enough to overcome for us and in us!

And finally, Jesus leads us into the panoramic pastures of paradise.

### **Application Three: We Sheep Will Listen to His Voice & Enjoy Abundance**

No wonder we sheep are so very attached to him, our excellent Good Shepherd!

First: No wonder we listen so carefully to his voice, as we've read today! No wonder your Bible is open for several minutes, and sometimes more, each and every morning—or is it every evening? You delight to hear your Shepherd's voice, and you know you find it in his Word. You fear what would happen to you if you weren't hearing it every day. You rejoice to know what his voice is doing for you, since you do hear it every day.

Second: No wonder we sheep enter so regularly through Christ, our Gate, into the comfort he offers to us in his Church! No wonder you are here today, and every single week. You want your Savior's songs sung into your heart. You want your Lord's words spoken into your soul. You want the comfortable coziness of a lamb, snuggling close to your Savior's chest. And that coziness is yours every week here at church.

Third: No wonder we sheep confidently exit through Christ, our Gate, into the world—so as to produce for him more sheep! No wonder we get our babies baptized quickly. No wonder we get them instructed in Christ, just as quickly as they can understand anything. No wonder we get them prepared without fail to receive Lord's Supper. No wonder, when they wander, we are the first: to want to spend time with them, and yank them out of a misbehaving peer group. We are the first: to declare to them the blessings of marriage, and to encourage them toward purity inside it and outside it. We are the first: to address them in their sinful difficulties, whether they are our own sheep, our grand-sheep, or simply other sheep near and dear to us.

And fourth: No wonder that through Christ: we have life—and such an abundance! No wonder you can't wait to wake up tomorrow and go to school: because

that's what your Good Shepherd has given you to do. No wonder you can't wait to get back to work: because that's where Jesus wants you. No wonder you keep loving and forgiving and dedicating yourself to others in your life, for the sake of Jesus Christ.

### **Conclusion: Our Good Shepherd Jesus Christ Makes Us More Independent**

And so, paradoxically, it is by acknowledging that we are sheep, dependent upon our Good Shepherd Jesus Christ, that we actually become more and more independent. I mean: Which one of us doesn't like to consider himself mature? Which one of us doesn't like to think of himself as his own man, or to think of herself as her own woman—taking care of his or her own business? Which one of us doesn't want to live: abundantly here, and eternally hereafter?

My friends: Jesus is the Gateway to that kind of life. Jesus will shepherd you there. Amen.

With David we say, especially today: *Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.* Amen.