

April 26, 2026

Good Shepherd Sunday

Psalm 23, John 10:1-10

We sometimes have a problem admitting our failures, our needs, our inability to accomplish something without help ... but at some point in our lives, we've all been there, we've all needed help, forgiveness, guidance.

I think the mistakes we make as children and teens are probably the easiest to admit to, because messing up is part of growing up ... following the crowd even when the crowd is being beyond foolish; throwing temper tantrums when we don't get our own way; thinking we don't need our parents' advice or guidance or rules.

As a kid and as a teen, as much as I insist I was close to perfect – I know I wasn't. I broke rules. I made decisions that I'm lucky to have survived. I sassed and sometimes even disrespected my parents. I'm not proud of that – but I am beyond grateful for the love, the guidance and the forgiveness my parents consistently gave me.

In the liturgical year, today is referred to as Good Shepherd Sunday. The lectionary we use includes the 23rd Psalm and the 10th chapter of John ... both speaking of the Good Shepherd.

Psalm 23 is a beloved Psalm, and it's often chosen for funerals, but it can become overused, un-appreciated, when we forget to really listen to the words. It's filled with words that promise us what God will do for us. It's not a list of what we need to be doing ... other than lying down in green pastures.

And John 10:1-10 includes more of the same – it talks of what Jesus is for us, and, other than following Him, there's not a lot of what we are to be doing.

What are the sheep to do? Aren't we supposed to be doing something? So many scripture passages, in fact, so many sermons, have an action plan. We look at the passage and see what it's calling us toward. But John's Gospel doesn't include the Sermon on the Mount or the Golden Rule. John focuses on Jesus being the Good Shepherd, the Sovereign Lord, who stands beside us, who does for us.

Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd, the Gate for the Sheep. He doesn't say that He is the Great Teacher, the Great Do-Gooder. In this passage, Jesus doesn't tell us to get busy doing good... but that's not saying we should not be out there doing good, just that John is centering on the part of Jesus who speaks to His disciples, as He is preparing to leave them – and tells them that He is a loving, searching, seeking, self-sacrificial Shepherd for His wayward and lost sheep who are dependent on Him.

Have we misunderstood Jesus' directive?

It kind of tears down the idea that we can do it all on our own. We should be leaving the heavy-lifting to Jesus. Yes, we can change ourselves; we can change the world; we can feed the hungry; we can love the lost; but we are able to do all these things by relying on, by following God ... not ourselves or our own desires.

This isn't about what WE have to do, but what God does for us, through us, with us. In John, Jesus says, "*I am the Light of the World. I am the Good Shepherd.*" He says that the wandering, wayward, lost sheep hear His voice and follow Him. That's our directive. We are those sheep!

Today's passages tell us that the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. He didn't just improve the sheep, or equip the sheep, or enlighten the sheep. He loves His sheep – US – so much that He lays down His life for us, He makes a way for us!

We don't, can't, shouldn't be trying, to save ourselves. It's impossible to do. Our deep comfort comes from the hope that we find in the 23rd Psalm. The Good Shepherd is our hope, and that's such a big reason we choose to read it at funerals.

After human striving, human contributions are over – where do we find our Hope? Our hope is in Jesus our Shepherd, who makes the way, prepares the path, guides us. We have not been abandoned!

We shall not want, because the Shepherd provides for us. He gives us rest, providing nourishment, when He knows that we need it; providing us with the way to salvation that only the Son can provide!

We are so loved that God guides us down those right paths that we ignore on our own. I personally thank God for His guidance and protection with every foolish decision I've ever made.

He walks with us through our darkest days. When we think that the world has turned on us, when we can't see any reason for our confusion, or are able to look beyond our grief, our loss – God is with us.

Probably most of us have seen a painting of the Good Shepherd, of Jesus, carrying a sheep, a lamb and it reminds me of the Poem – “Footprints in the Sand.”

One night I dreamed a dream.
As I was walking along the beach with my Lord.
Across the dark sky flashed scenes from my life.
For each scene, I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand,
One belonging to me and one to my Lord.

After the last scene of my life flashed before me,
I looked back at the footprints in the sand.
I noticed that at many times along the path of my life,
especially at the very lowest and saddest times,
there was only one set of footprints.

This really troubled me, so I asked the Lord about it.
"Lord, you said once I decided to follow you, You'd walk with me all the way.
But I noticed that during the saddest and most troublesome times of my life,
there was only one set of footprints.
I don't understand why, when I needed You the most, You would leave me."

He whispered, "My precious child, I love you and will never leave you
Never, ever, during your trials and testings.
When you saw only one set of footprints, It was then that I carried you."

He is with us always!

In today's passage from John, the Shepherd knows each of His sheep by name and leads them. Hold on to that promise. God loves us and calls us individually by our names!

Jesus tells us that His sheep, who recognize the Shepherd's voice, are to enter through the gate that He has opened for us.

We should think about how we recognize the Shepherd's voice. God's voice is a loving voice. If we hear a voice that says we are no good, than it's not the Good Shepherd's voice.

God's voice calls us to love one another and to share our gifts and treasures. If we hear a voice that says that we deserve to take whatever we want and to keep it for ourselves, than it's not the Good Shepherd's voice. God's voice is gentle, but firm, rather than threatening. If the voice we hear says "Come with me, or else ..." it's not the voice of the Good Shepherd.

God's voice invites us, in fact it challenges us to be our best self. If the voice we hear tells us that something is too hard to even consider attempting – it's probably not the Good Shepherd.

A shepherd cares for its flock with complete, utter devotion and the Good Shepherd cares for us with an even stronger devotion. We are more than a number to God – He cares for us individually!

Jesus speaks of being the Gate. A gate doesn't only open to let us in – which it certainly does – Jesus is indeed our only way to salvation, to enter God's presence... but it also closes to keep out thieves who come in an attempt to steal, kill, destroy.

That gate protects us. We stay in the fold – a place of security, a place of promise. Yes, we can believe in God, we can have faith, we can find salvation without this building, without the people around us, without the fellowship, without the shared time of worship ... but God has given us each other. In the community of other sheep, we find support and comfort.

Although these passages tell us all that God does for us, all that Jesus is for us, if the sheep truly follow their shepherd, if we truly follow our Shepherd, we will be like our Shepherd.

When we are lost, when we are tempted by the world – God searches for us, lifts us up on His shoulders and brings us home. God continues to love us, comfort us, heal us, strengthen us, guide us, feed us. We are dependent on God's guidance, but through us, God also guides those who are still lost, those who still struggle, who need to feel the Shepherd. As the church, we are called to compassionately tend His sheep, to be an expression of God's love, to all we meet.

We thank God that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, leads us in places we never would have gone by ourselves. Jesus guides us, stands with us, defends us when we can't defend ourselves. Jesus willingly died for the poor decision making, stubborn, dumb, wayward sheep ... us.

This Sunday we admit that we are the sheep and we need our Shepherd, always.