

THE GOOD SHEPHERD LAYS DOWN HIS LIFE FOR THE SHEEP

A sermon for April 22, 2018, by the Rev. Dr. James Mutayoba
The Fourth Sunday of Easter

Gospel: **John 10:11-18**

'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. 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. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.'

PRAYER: Good shepherd; You seek the lost and guide them to safety. Continue to feed your flock with your green pasture of the Word, bind our wounds, and protect us from the ravenous wolves. Make us one fold under one Shepherd. Amen.

I am the good Shepherd, the good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep... "There is no greater love than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."

The first time I came to Trinity, I used my GPS. When I arrived it told me, You have arrived at your destination. But I thought, this is a mistaken identity. The visual image, I saw on your Logo was the symbolism of The Good Shepherd. But the name of the Community is Trinity. Is this a mistaken identity, I thought! Electronic devices sometimes convey wrong messages. I thought. But indeed, I was at the right address, at TRINITY Lutheran Church, in Olney.

I want to start my sermon this morning with the case of mistaken identity. It is the story of Eric, a Police Officer who loved his work and the community he served and was paid well for his services. The door to Eric's locker at the Police Station bore the following words, "*There is no greater love than this that a man lays down one's life for his friends*" (John 15:13)

Eric's life ended abruptly when he was killed in the line of duty. Ironically, Jesus' noble ideal which Eric had so carefully chosen to put on his locker door seemed to come to pass and he paid the ultimate price.

That said, certain questions arise:

- Was Eric's death a substitutionary death?
- Did Eric die for others?
- Was Eric the sacrifice?
- Who offered this sacrifice?
- To what god was this sacrifice offered?

Eric died in the line of duty because of a mistaken identity. Yes, he died in someone else's place. Yes, he died because of the criminal act of someone else. But, he didn't die as a sacrifice.

Today's Scripture says, "*I am the Good shepherd; the good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*" The word Shepherd is introduced by the definite article "**The**." This implies that there is **only one Good Shepherd** in heaven, on earth, or under the earth -- namely, Jesus. The definite article "THE" distinguishes Jesus from all other shepherds. It emphatically and uniquely designates Jesus to be the most outstanding because *he laid down his life for his sheep.*

Jesus was a substitutionary sacrifice. Jesus' death on the cross was the act of *laying down his life for (in place of) his sheep.* Jesus did not die to demonstrate that we should also die for a great cause -- **NO! NO! NO!** It means that Christ died in our place, in our stead, as a substitute. The idea is that Jesus gave himself on our behalf. ***The Good shepherd gave his life as a substitute for the sheep.*** (John 10:11)

Jesus is the Good Shepherd. Not a hireling. Not a false shepherd. Not an irresponsible Shepherd. Jesus was born to be THE Shepherd. He himself says, "***I am the Shepherd***" meaning, HE is the Shepherd of the sheep. The sheep are all the children of God.

Jesus knows his sheep by name.

- He knows their joys and their blessings.
- He knows their trials and sorrows.
- He knows all their wanderings and stumbings,
- their needs and their lack of needs.

The Good Shepherd keeps his mind on his sheep. He cares for them.

- The sheep know his voice,
- they distinguish his voice from among many other voices.
- They love his care, his mind, his Word,
- his companionship and his leadership.
- They acknowledge his experience and his pastures.

The fact that the sheep know him well is proof that He is the Good Shepherd. That is why he goes before them and they follow him -- they know his voice.

Jesus is the Great Shepherd, the Chief Shepherd of the sheep because he died and was raised from the dead. As stated in Hebrews 13:20, '*the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant.*' The hired shepherd is not the Good Shepherd because to be hired is temporary position. A hireling is not "THE" shepherd because he works on a contractual time limit. The hired shepherd does not own

the sheep. He is hired until the real Shepherd comes along. The hired shepherd is not true or permanent. He is false, unfaithful, and irresponsible. He flees when danger hits the flock. The kings of Israel were called shepherds. Most of them are classified as false shepherds (Isaiah 56:9-12); they scattered the flock instead of feeding it (Jeremiah 23:1-2; 25:34-38); they fed themselves instead of feeding the sheep (Ezekiel 34:1-6; 7-31).

The unfaithful and irresponsible shepherd has little sense of responsibility for the sheep. The hired shepherd does the job for what he can get out of it, not for the care of the flock. His primary interest is his job-security, his wages, his benefits and his position. He values himself rather than the sheep. He has no natural care for the sheep. He seeks to save himself and not the sheep -- leaving them exposed to being eaten or ravaged by wolves. The remaining sheep are scattered and lost.

But the ultimate owner of the 'sheep' is God the Father. And the Father and the Son are one. Jesus died for the sheep which proves him to be the Good Shepherd. We, as the people of God, are the sheep saved because Jesus laid down his life for the sheep. Jesus never fled from his calling and his purpose.

Now Jesus' purpose is to enlarge the fold -- '***I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also,***' Jesus says. These sheep currently follow other religions and other teachers. The worldwide evangelism ministry is there to make disciples of the all world. Jesus commissions **US** to extend his fold thru evangelism.

For Jesus, there is no difference between Jew or gentile. Jesus is Lord of all. The '**other sheep**' refers to those who will join the fold through his and our action. Jesus is emphatic, "***I MUST bring them.***" The fact is, he and **WE** are compelled to reach out to other sheep that are not yet of his fold. Future sheep are to become sheep of Jesus' fold when they **hear his voice**. It is our commission to **make sure they hear his voice**.

There *will* be **ONE FLOCK** and **ONE SHEPHERD!**

Friends, Jesus is not a thief who comes to kill and scatter sheep. Instead, Jesus, the Good Shepherd, *laid down his life* for the benefit of the sheep. He enfolds them all with abundant life.

We are in good hands with our Good Shepherd. He is committed to us. It is our responsibility to stay in the flock. As the apostle Paul writes, "***Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, building yourselves together in peace. For there is one body, one Spirit, just as we have been called to one glorious hope. There is one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, and one God, the Father, who is over all and in all and living thru all.***" (Ephesians 4:3-5)

That is the flock for which we are called and the Shepherd to whom we belong.

Amen.