



**"Jesus, the Good Shepherd"**  
**Scripture – John 10:11-21**  
**Sermon preached by Jill Getty**  
**Sunday, August 15, 2021**

"I AM" Sermon Series:

*If four artists were to paint the same model, they would create four unique portraits. Their works would differ based on perspective, personal style, or simply the play of the light. In the same way, the four Gospel writers create four unique portraits of Jesus the Messiah. One way John paints his portrait is through metaphor — comparing Christ to images that would be familiar to the Gospel's original audience: bread, light, shepherd, vine. Throughout the Gospel, Jesus likens himself to various objects and concepts through statements that always begin the same way: "I am ..." During Dr. Jones' sabbatical, the Rev. Sudie Niesen Thompson — along with the Rev. Jill Getty and the Rev. Dr. Tracy Keenan — will explore the seven "I AM" statements of John's Gospel and the ways they contribute to a unique portrait of the Messiah who dwells among us.*

*"Jesus, the Good Shepherd," which focuses on the statement, "I am the Good Shepherd," is the fourth sermon in the series.*

Ross and I went to Northern Ireland and Scotland in 2019. While there we drove through the beautiful countryside admiring the incredible lushness and green grass. One of my favorite sights that spring was seeing sheep with their little lambs graze in the pastures. Their little woolly coats and sweet faces grabbed my heart. I must have taken fifty or more pictures of sheep on that trip.

While in Ireland, we visited one of Ross' cousins who owns a chicken farm, and they took us on a tour of their farm. And yes – they had some of the beloved sheep. I decided to talk to the sheep. They got a good long look at us and decided we looked scary and that they did not know us. So all of a sudden the whole flock scampered off to the far side of the pen and turned their backs on us.

The sheep in Scotland seemed a bit more rugged than the sheep in Northern Ireland. I stood on the side of the one lane road looking at an enormous long haired sheep with horns. There was a small lamb standing near it. This gigantic sheep stared me down and did not run off or give way. It looked powerful and fierce standing there to protect its young one. And the young one did not look phased at all because its parent was there guarding it.

Sheep are amazing creatures with unique characteristics: Their colors range from white to chocolate to black. Their fleeces vary. Some have crimped hair; some have long hair and some do not grow wool at all. Sheep have excellent peripheral vision with visual fields of 270°. They can see behind themselves without turning their heads.<sup>1</sup>

They may or may not have horns. They have good hearing. They have scent glands near their eyes and on their feet which assist the young to find their mothers. They can overgraze a pasture faster than cattle. Sheep are social animals. They congregate close to other members of their flock; and can become stressed when separated from members of their flock.<sup>2</sup>

Relationships in flocks tend to be closest among related sheep. Sheep can recognize individual human faces and the faces of other sheep, and remember them for years. The bleats of individual sheep are distinctive, enabling the ewe and her lambs to recognize each other. Bleating may also signal distress, frustration, impatience or loneliness. Sheep must have a leader – a shepherd – and must be guided otherwise they'll wander off and get lost.<sup>3</sup>

Sheep are actually a lot like people – which brings us to the importance of the Shepherd. Abraham, Jacob, Moses and David were all shepherds in the Old Testament. David was an ancestor of Jesus and before David was king he was a shepherd who loved and faithfully tended his sheep – many of our psalms in the bible were written by David. The angels first appeared to shepherds after Jesus was born and they were the first to spread the good news of the Jesus' birth in Bethlehem.

The people were very familiar with the shepherds and sheep so this metaphor becomes a teaching segment for the people of God to understand who Jesus is and for the religious leaders to have a greater understanding of how to focus their ministry and treat their flock. Jesus uses the metaphor of the sheep and the Shepherd to explain to the Pharisees and religious leaders that he is the Good Shepherd. The fact that Jesus says he is the Good Shepherd automatically implies there are some bad shepherds.

Jesus had a run in with the Pharisees and the religious leaders in the chapter preceding our verses for today. Jesus uses the verses today as a response to the hateful behavior the Pharisees had towards a blind beggar. In John 9, Jesus healed a blind beggar on the Sabbath. When the Pharisees learned of this they did not rejoice that a man had his vision restored, instead they were enraged that Jesus had performed a miracle on the Sabbath when no work should be done. The Pharisees in this incident chose not to see the beggar as a real person in need of help. They often treated people as pawns or they would disgrace people and make them feel unclean, unworthy and useless. The Pharisees and religious leaders wanted to distort what Jesus said by calling him a heretic and saying he was possessed by a demon because he dared to break the rules and heal someone on the Sabbath when no work should be done – not even healing work.

Using the Good Shepherd metaphor, Jesus is contrasting himself to the Pharisees. Imagine how wonderful the people felt listening to Jesus – a teacher that actually gave them hope; feed them spiritually and physically; brought healing to their lives; told them the truth of God's love and gave them the ability to have an abundant life. That was a vastly different experience for them than the experiences they had with other religious authorities.

The key quality that Jesus says the good shepherd has is that the Good Shepherd loves the sheep so much that he lays down his life for the sheep. The implication is this will enable the sheep to have an abundant life. Jesus

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<sup>1</sup> Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia. Sheep. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheep> Accessed on August 6, 2021;

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

speaks of laying down his life 5 times in these verses. This is the key point that he is making to the Jewish people following him and the Pharisees who are seeking to rouse the crowds against him. The good shepherd is not like the hired hand.

The good shepherd is there in good times; bad, scary, and dangerous times; boring times; and times of joy and new birth. The good shepherd does not stand on the religious politics, oppressive rules, arrogant lies and deceitful power plays that bring hate-filled accusations, abhorrent behavior and abuse to the sheep.

In these verses, Jesus also alerts the crowd that he has sheep that do not belong to this flock and he MUST bring those other sheep into the fold. He says the other sheep will listen to him. Once those sheep are brought in, there will be no division – there will be one flock and one shepherd and the shepherd will treat all the sheep the same. Jesus is telling the crowd that he came for the Jews and the Gentiles – Jesus is the Good Shepherd for all people not just one group of people.

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, was a rabbi – a teacher. The spirit of the Good Shepherd is always present in a good teacher. Because a good teacher is a shepherd who cares about her students.

While in elementary school, I had one of my worst teachers. We were all afraid of her. She was mean, liked to humiliate students in front of others; and she screamed and yelled a great deal of the time. One of her joys seemed to be derived from criticizing students for whatever misdemeanors she perceived. In general she seemed to hate her students, her job and herself. My classmates and I were very thankful for the last day of school that year when we would never have to have her as our teacher again. She was what our verses today would have called a hired hand – someone who does not care for the sheep.

In contrast, I had a wonderful teacher and shepherd in high school. She was filled with joy. Everyone in our English class loved her. She made learning fun and had a passion for her subject. She was filled with energy; smiled when we got the answers correct; and gave us interesting projects and assignments that enhanced the materials we were studying. She believed in us; challenged us to do our best and was creative. We took pride in pleasing her and doing our work. We felt that she cared about us and wanted us to succeed. We knew we could count on her. She was approachable and willing to help us outside of class hours if we did not understand something. She saw us and did not look down on us. She never tired of doing good for her students. Her aim was to have us succeed so we could make it to college and find our way in the world. Even now – 3 decades later, thinking about her brings great joy to my heart and soul. She was a good shepherd. We have all had good teachers and bad teachers; good shepherds and bad shepherds in our lives.

By laying down his life, Jesus, The Good Shepherd will protect the sheep from two sources:

- the hired hand who does not care about them and
- the wolves, bandits and thieves that want to come and take their life away.

When a gunman entered the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida in 2018, teachers who were also coaches put themselves between the gunman and the students, literally taking the bullets that were aimed at students to protect them and defend them. Aaron Feis, teacher and assistant football coach, had written on his FaceBook page that “a coach will impact more young people in a year than the average person does in a lifetime.”<sup>4</sup> On that fateful day, as the gunman sprayed bullets through the building he lived that statement by

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<sup>4</sup> **Crystal Bonvillian.** Florida shooting heroes: 3 coaches, teachers gave lives for students. <https://www.ajc.com/news/national/florida-shooting-heroes-coaches-teachers-gave-lives-save-students/SHMhmL7h1WEIYJhqw1SCWL/> accessed Aug 12, 2021.

throwing himself between students and the gunman. Chris Hixon, the athletic director at the school, died after rushing towards the gunfire instead of away from it when the gunman started shooting. He was a beloved teacher and coach who was known for giving students rides and lunch money when they needed it and putting the needs of others above his own.<sup>5</sup> Scott Beigel, geography teacher and cross country coach ushered students into the safety of his classroom while the shooting was happening. When he realized more students were in the hallway, he unlocked the door to let the extra ones in. He did not have a chance to relock the door so he blocked the door with his body. Students in the classroom said they would never forget his sacrificial actions that saved their lives.<sup>6</sup> (#3 endnote) Tragically, the school lost 3 teachers and 14 students that day. But who knows how many lives were saved because of the actions of the teachers who gave up their lives protecting the students. We can see the spirit of the Good Shepherd in these teachers and many other people who are called to help and serve.

There are police who go into situations of domestic violence that put themselves between the spouse who has a gun and the spouse who is defenseless.

We are coming up on the twentieth anniversary of 9-11 when the terrorists flew planes into the world trade center, the pentagon and into a field in Pennsylvania. Many of us who remember that day, still get chills thinking about the scenes of fire fighters and other good souls that ran back into the towers literally laying down their lives to save the lives of others.

There are medical personnel who go in COVID patient rooms putting their lives in danger to bring care and healing to those who are victims of this pandemic. These are harsh and true realities of people laying down their lives for others. The bravery it takes to follow in the path of the Good Shepherd is immense.

And right now while our entire world is sick with the pandemic, we need Jesus, The Good Shepherd and people who will follow him. Jesus cares about our plight and what we are going through and how all of these world issues are effecting us.

There will always be bad shepherds and hired hands that do not care. But there will also always be Jesus, The Good Shepherd who is also the Great Shepherd, the Chief Shepherd and Our Shepherd. We are not alone. Jesus stands with us, leads us to better pathways and encourages us to lean on him during these trials.

Pray to the Good Shepherd for continued guidance and help as we traverse these times of extreme hardship. Amen.

### **Prayers of the People – Sudie Niesen Thompson**

God, our Shepherd,  
you are our guide, our protector, our comforter, our friend.  
As another school year begins,  
we are grateful for your companionship  
and we trust that you will sustain us on the journey ahead.

We ask your blessing upon these school supplies,  
and upon the students who use them.  
May such tools of learning enrich the process of learning

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

so that all children and youth grow in wisdom and understanding,  
and discover gifts and skills to be used for your glory.

God, as students of all ages set foot into new classrooms,  
form new communities, and face new challenges,  
hold them in your tender care and guide them in right paths.  
May the assurance of your love  
help learners young and old take risks,  
tackle problems,  
and face their fears with courage and confidence.

Bless those who shepherd our young people —  
the teachers who share knowledge and instill a love of learning;  
the mentors and counselors who offer guidance and care;  
the administrators who keep things running smoothly;  
the crossing guards who protect children from harm,  
the custodians who ensure classrooms are clean and safe,  
the cafeteria workers who prepare a feast for the flock,  
the parents, grandparents, guardians, and friends  
who nurture and support these children you cherish.  
May all these shepherds embody your love,  
show forth your care, and model your grace,  
so that goodness and mercy fill the rooms where learning takes place.

God, as we bless our backpacks,  
we lift before you *all* the things we carry —  
our hopes and dreams for the upcoming year,  
as well as the things that weigh us down:  
our frets and our fears, our doubts and disappointments.  
As we carry these things into the days and weeks ahead  
help us take comfort in your promise to be with us,  
whether the way winds through shadowed valleys  
or leads us to pastures green.

This we pray in the name of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who taught us how to pray:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And, lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever. Amen.**