

I Just Wanna' Be a Sheep!

A sermon based on John 10:22-30 – ***“Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter,²³ and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon’s Colonnade.²⁴ The Jews who were there gathered around him, saying, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.”***

²⁵ Jesus answered, “I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father’s name testify about me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one.”

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I’m sure you’ve heard it before. Sheep are dumb animals. With a brain only the size of my fist, these creatures seem to lack even the most common sense, what with stories of lambs who get their heads stuck in the fence...in the same place...for multiple days in row. The farmer who dumps their food in the trough – same time every day – and the group of ewes look longingly at him, threatening to riot because they’re so hungry...although their food is sitting over there, just 10 feet away.

And yet, a day like today, Good Shepherd Sunday, I can’t help but think of a popular children’s song which parents teach their kids: ***“I just wanna be a sheep, baa, baa, baa, baa; I just wanna be a sheep, baa, baa, baa, baa; I pray the Lord my soul to keep; I just wanna be a sheep, baa, baa, baa, baa.”*** Really?!? If there’s an animal you’d want to be or mold yourself after, it would be a sheep? Again, really?!?

Well, an article I read this past week started to debunk this “dumb” reputation sheep tend to have. It said the reality is, **[“Sheep are actually surprisingly intelligent, with impressive memory and recognition skills. They build friendships, stick up for one another in fights, and feel sad when their friends are sent to slaughter. They are also one of the most destructive creatures on the planet.”](#)**

Maybe makes you start to rethink your views on sheep, doesn’t it? Maybe that children’s song is on to something...may I do just wanna be a sheep. But it’s not because of how great sheep actually are. I just wanna be a sheep because of who my Shepherd is.

And who is that? That’s actually a good question...one similar to what the Pharisees were asking Jesus in our gospel for today. You know, this was a couple months after Jesus had called himself the “Good Shepherd” (at the beginning of John 10), and the Pharisees who had been present then accused him of being ***“demon-possessed and raving mad” (John 10:20).***

So their question today kind of seems odd, ***“How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.”*** I’m sure your reaction would be exactly what Jesus said, ***“I did tell you.”*** A couple of months ago. Or when John the Baptist, in the early days of Jesus’ ministry, had said, ***“Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).*** How about in John 7, where Jesus had told

them, ***“You know me, and you know where I am from. I am not here on my own, but he who sent me is true.”*** Or in chapter 8, where he had said, ***“I tell you the truth, before Abraham was born, I am.”*** All of those, clear – at least to the Pharisees – clear indications Jesus was in fact the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God.

They knew it, but, as Jesus said, they did not believe. Jesus went even further and said, ***“The miracles I do in my Father’s name (which they had seen) speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep.”***

They weren’t his sheep. And why not? ***“My sheep listen to my voice.”*** Jesus’ followers listen to him. They listen to his Word. They follow his Word. Those Pharisees had no intention of doing that.

“My sheep listen to my voice.” You know, that is something admirable about sheep. For the bad raps sheep get – again, not very smart, they’re utterly helpless on their own, they’re prone to wander, this one thing they do: they listen to their shepherd’s voice. Go to a watering hole in the desert of Palestine. You’ll find multiple shepherds and their flocks, all mingled together there because water is scarce. You would think it’d be tough to separate them all out, but it’s not. All it takes is for the shepherd to call out and instantly the sheep follow his voice. Sheep will not budge for a stranger’s voice. So, again, here, Jesus says, ***“My sheep listen to my voice...they follow me.”***

From Jesus’ own words, we know that wasn’t the Pharisees. From their own actions, which we saw displayed throughout Jesus’ walk to the cross, we know the Pharisees weren’t Jesus’ sheep. Those who are not among God’s chosen flock turn deaf ears and blinded eyes to Jesus...and that was the Pharisees, in spite of Jesus’ clear words and powerful miracles pointing to his divinity. He’s God, and they refused to believe it. They refused to listen to him.

How about you? Obviously, our tune would match the children’s song: ***“I don’t wanna be a Pharisee; I don’t wanna be a Pharisee; ‘cause they’re not fair you see; I don’t wanna be a Pharisee, uh-uh...I just wanna be a sheep...”*** But is that really true? Do you want to be a sheep? How good are we at hearing the Good Shepherd’s voice in the midst of all the rest? How good are we at following our Shepherd?

Let’s talk about Finley. Finley’s our family dog. We love Finley. Many of you have met Finley. You might also know Finley doesn’t always like to listen. It’s not all the time, but he has his moments. There’s someone over at church he’d rather greet instead of coming inside, or maybe it’s the person walking way over on the sidewalk that he sees. The squirrels or ravens are chattering at him, agitating him, and barking back at them seems like much more fun than listening to his master tell him to “come.” Staying under the kitchen table, licking up crumbs, sometimes it’s as if he’s completely deaf to the command to “get out” when it comes to food. That’s his love language. Finley will do anything for a treat...what he wants.

When it comes to our Good Shepherd and listening to and following voice, are we really any different from Finley? There are plenty of voices wanting to lead you...led you astray. We have the voice of our Shepherd...in his Word. And we listen to him sometimes – God be praised – but not always. You see, there’s also the voice inside of us that says, “Follow your heart. Make life easier for yourself. Wouldn’t Jesus want that? Follow your feelings and do what’s right for you.” It’s much like Finley...do what’s going to be beneficial for you...what’s going to be in your best interest. It’s an easy voice to listen to because

we can convince ourselves of just about anything. But you have to ask, "Where does that voice lead you?"

The voices want you to follow...to follow them away from Christ. Your heart wants to beat, "I am my own little lamb." Friends who tempt you want you to sing, "I am my friend's little lamb." Greed gets us to sing, "I am money's little lamb." Academic knowledge for its own sake tempts me to sing, "I am my own little lamb." None of those sound right, do they? Friends, those voices do not lead to the joy and pleasure they promise. They lead to lonely places where faith withers and love grows cold.

Jesus talked about that place in Matthew's gospel: ***"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left....⁴¹ "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels...⁴⁶ "Then they will go away to eternal punishment" (Matthew 25:31-46).***

My brother and his family, years ago, got rid their dog Bennett because he didn't have what they called "listening ears." For those who follow any other voice other than the Good Shepherd's, we ought to be the goats. We ought to be separated from his sheep on the Last Day. We ought to hear him say, "I don't know you. You are not familiar to me." He ought to get rid of us and send us away to eternal punishment.

And, with repentant hearts, we say, ***"I don't wanna be a goat...nope; I don't wanna be a goat...nope, 'cause they haven't got any hope; I don't wanna be a goat...nope; I just wanna be a sheep..."***

And, the reality is, even though we don't always want to be his sheep...even though we don't always act like his sheep...even though we couldn't be his sheep on our own, listen to what the Good Shepherd says, ***"I know them."*** "I know my sheep." And you're one of them.

And why can you be sure you're a sheep? Why can you be sure the Good Shepherd knows you?

1) Look at who the Good Shepherd is. Jesus says, ***"I and the Father are one."*** Our Good Shepherd is God in the flesh. And 2) Look at what the Good Shepherd has done for you. Go back earlier in John 10, and hear Jesus say, ***"I lay down my life for the sheep."*** And you know that not only did the Good Shepherd lay down his life for his sheep; he became a sheep...the ***"Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."***

Perhaps you recall the familiar words of Isaiah, ***"Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. ⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. ⁷ He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth" (Isaiah 53:4-7).***

And why did he do that? Why did Jesus, this perfect, spotless Lamb of God go to the slaughter, to the cross and suffer death and hell for sinful sheep who listen to other, sinful voices and stray from the

Good Shepherd? Because we're his sheep. He loves us. He knows us. He wants us in his eternal fold. So Jesus lived, and died, and rose for us to make us his sheep.

And not only has he done that. Think about the blessings we have now in being sheep of the Good Shepherd. 1) The shepherd knows his sheep. And the Greek word used for "know" here indicates a thorough, intimate, personal knowledge. Jesus knows you better than you know yourself – what makes you tick, what makes you happy, sad, what you need the most (and he provides it). 2) We follow the shepherd. We have one who knows the route we need to be on to get to eternal glory, and he's leading us there through his Word. 3) We are safe in the shepherd's care. The song goes, "**I pray the Lord my soul to keep.**" He does. We are secure forever with Christ Jesus. Our security is locked up with the Father in heaven. Nothing, no one can snatch us out of Jesus' hands because that would mean seizing us from God the Father's hands. And no one can do that.

And finally, 4) Sheep listen obediently to the voice of the shepherd. I mean, you hear all the Shepherd has done for us and the continued blessings of being his sheep, and hopefully you're thinking, "I just wanna be a sheep..." I just wanna be his sheep. Well, what can we do? Well, this past week was Teacher's Appreciation week, so you saw the gifts, the meals parents of students were giving to their teachers...showing their thankfulness for them. It's Mother's Day today, so it's flowers, cards, taking Mom out to eat, letting her have a peaceful afternoon...all those showing love for Mom.

So what about for the Good Shepherd? How can we show our appreciation and love for our Good Shepherd. It's simple. Listen to his voice. Follow him. In other words, listen to his Word and do what it says. Listen to his under-shepherds...pastors, which literally mean "shepherd," as they serve the Good Shepherd. That's it...listen, follow, obey.

"I just wanna be a sheep, baa, baa, baa, baa; I just wanna be a sheep, baa, baa, baa, baa; I pray the Lord my soul to keep; I just wanna be a sheep, baa, baa, baa, baa." By the grace of God and the selfless sacrifice of the Good Shepherd, you are. And now, as sheep, safe and secure for all eternity, we listen, follow, obey. Amen.

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