

Mark D. Reichert

Confirmation – John 10:11-18 – Jesus is *Your* Good Shepherd  
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Confirmation day is one of those days when parents ask, how did my son, how did my daughter grow up so fast? You're teenagers now, people who are taking steps toward adulthood. But it really wasn't so long ago that when you were scared – no matter if you were alone in the dark at night or lost in a crowd in broad daylight – there was only one thing that could comfort you: hearing your parent's voice. For a young child who doesn't know how to be on their own, their parent's voice is that one thing they know they can trust; so when their parents speak, they immediately and wholeheartedly listen and believe.

That's a picture that's maybe a little more familiar to us than the picture of a shepherd with his sheep, but for the people Jesus was speaking to, it would've meant just as much. See, sheep have very little sense or ability to take care of themselves. They need shepherds because otherwise they have no one else to look after them. And so in much the same way as children with their parents, sheep grow to know their shepherd's voice and trust it completely. When their shepherd speaks, the sheep listen, because they know that this is the person who truly cares for them.

And that's why this picture Jesus uses here is so meaningful for us, especially on a day like today. This is how it is between us and Jesus – like the relationship between shepherd and sheep. See, this world is a dangerous place – physically, yes, but especially spiritually, and so we need someone we can trust – someone selfless who loves us and guides us and protects us from everything out there that can harm us. Well thankfully, that's why we have Jesus. Here's what he says to you: *"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep."*

That's a pretty good way of summarizing what we've been doing in our Confirmation classes these last two years: getting to know Jesus and what he's done for us to save us. Listening to Jesus' voice as we studied the truths of his Word. And coming to see Jesus as the

Shepherd-Savior we absolutely need and cannot do without for now or forever, because he brings us greater blessings than anyone or anything else in this world ever could.

See, if you're going to stand before all these people today and confess that Jesus is *your* Good Shepherd, then let's first make sure we all know why that's so important. Our lesson from John here says that what makes Jesus *your* Good Shepherd is that he didn't run when the devil came looking to snatch you away to death and hell. No, he looked at you and said that you are *irreplaceable*, that you are worth fighting for, that he would never want to be apart from you or any other precious soul for whom he was willing to pour out his blood and die. The Good Shepherd voluntarily laid down his life to save you from sin and death – to save sheep that only ever got lost and in trouble and tried his patience. Jesus' sacrifice meant that his sheep were safe and the wolf was defeated forever. That's what *your* Good Shepherd was willing to do for you to make you his own, because that's how much he loves you!

Yes, Jesus died and rose again to bring you salvation and to secure your relationship as Shepherd and sheep forevermore, and his resurrection means that your resurrection is a certainty one day, too. Everyone who believes in him is going to rise from the dead on that Last Day and live forever with Jesus in the eternal safety and security of heaven's green pastures and quiet waters. The devil can't rip you out of his hands, no matter how hard or how much he continues to try, because our Good Shepherd laid down his life to save us and took it up again to bring us into his flock forever.

That's the blessed truth that you've come to know by listening to your Good Shepherd's voice in these last years. Jesus sealed our relationship with his own blood, and he made it so that there is no closer relationship in all creation now than the one between Shepherd and sheep, Savior and saved. That means your Good Shepherd cares for you deeply and he *knows* you, through and through – there is no one who knows you better and no one who cares about you more. He knows all your needs, your wants, your strengths, your weaknesses, your desires, your cares, your anxieties, your fears, your innermost thoughts that you don't want anyone else to know and your deepest,

most intimate feelings that you might not even be able to put into words. Jesus knows us better than we know ourselves, and as our grateful, loving response for all his goodness, he says to you now: Know me and follow me.

So how do you do that? By making sure that what we're doing here today isn't a graduation, isn't the end of the line. Rather, just like we said at the beginning of our time together in Confirmation class, this is a good start to a lifetime of spiritual growth and service. And that's exactly what you're going to be promising before God and all these people in a few minutes. These aren't just words, this isn't just some rite of passage, and God doesn't take empty promises lightly. So if Jesus wants us to know him and follow him, then that means now is the time to commit to a regular habit of worship and Bible study that will keep your faith strong, living, and growing throughout your life and into eternity!

I mean, remember what the job of a shepherd is: to feed his sheep, to water his sheep, to protect his sheep against anything that would try to harm them. Well that's exactly what Jesus wants to do for you and for your souls too, and the tools he uses are his Word and his Sacraments and the fellowship of your brothers and sisters in Christ that we enjoy together here in his house. A wandering sheep that doesn't follow its shepherd puts its life in serious danger from hunger and thirst and predators, but a sheep that listens to its Shepherd's voice, that follows his loving leadership, and that stays with the rest of the flock will be strong and secure and blessed both now and forever. That's why it's so very important to make and to keep these vows like you're doing today, because staying close to Jesus and following him faithfully really is a matter of life and death, both spiritually and eternally.

So friends, my last word to you here is really just a summary reminder of everything we've been saying all year long: Jesus is *your* Good Shepherd who loved you so much that he lived, died, and rose again for you to save you from your sins and open heaven to your forever. There is no one who has done more for you, who wants what is better for you, or who cares about you more than him. So when we hear his voice in the pages of God's Word, let's do as sheep do – let's listen and believe and always come back for more, because that will always

keep us close to him and build us up in our faith. Let's follow wherever he leads through this life, because we know that *he* knows what's best for us. He will never abandon us, and he promises that he will finally guide us along the narrow path to salvation to the safety and peace of his eternal sheepfold. Yes, Jesus is *your* Good Shepherd – that's what you've been learning all along and that's the timeless truth that we are here to confess and celebrate together, so friends, God bless you the rest of your days as you continue to hear him, know him, and follow him. Amen.