

**There is Only Us**  
**John 10:11-18**  
**April 22, 2018 – Fourth Sunday of Easter**

Friends, have you ever felt like a sheep. Typically, at least in your twenty-first century society, calling someone a sheep is not a compliment. It tends to mean that we *blindly* follow where someone else leads and ignore the ramifications. But I guess the merits of being a sheep depend on who's leading.

Here, in the tenth chapter of John's Gospel, we find this rich story about Jesus, the Good Shepherd. You might remember that, back at Christmas time, when I spoke of the shepherds running to see the newborn babe, I referred to the shepherds as the lowest rung of society – hired hands that did not own the sheep and had little skill or education; but that's Luke's story. Here in John, such is clearly not the case. In fact, Jesus refers to those "hired hands" who flee when a wolf approaches. The wolf attacks and the sheep scatter in a sort of "every person for themselves" scenario.

But here, Jesus says, "I am the Good Shepherd, and the Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep." To this shepherd there is nothing more important than the sheep. I've preached on several occasions about "Jesus, the Good Shepherd." Usually, it's been at Easter; and I've commented about that statement in John's story of the resurrection, where Mary, standing weeping in the garden, finally recognizes Jesus when he calls her by name. Indeed, it's just a few verses before today's reading that John tells us "[The Good Shepherd] calls the sheep by name and leads them out... and the sheep follow him, because they know his voice." (John 10:3-4) Yes, I believe the story of Mary recognizing Jesus when he calls her by name, is a direct reference to this verse. And so, I have asked, "Do you hear Jesus calling your name? Where is he calling you? Where is he leading you?" And all of those questions are still valid. But today's lectionary goes still deeper.

First we recognize what we might call a passion prediction and a resurrection prediction, as Jesus says, "I lay down my life for the sheep and I take it up again." Friends, I said it on Easter Sunday morning. What's so special about Easter? It's not just that Jesus has conquered death. It's not just the promise of eternal life in the presence of God's glory. People have sometimes asked me, "Wasn't there life after death, eternal life in heaven, in the time before Jesus?" Of course there was. Our loving, and merciful, and gracious God always existed and always will exist. So what's so special about Easter? What's so special about the resurrection? – the promise of God's eternal love, in the person and in the eternal presence of Jesus Christ, walking with us at all times and in all places – in life, in death, and in life beyond death. That's the great gift of God's amazing love – a gift that will never die. And that's the glory of Easter.

God took on human form to live and die for us. In that death, Christ freed us from the sins that might stand in the way of our relationship with a loving God. Then Christ rose from the dead to walk with us always, to be in relationship with us always, to love us always, to lead us always, and always means always. So, indeed, the Good Shepherd laid down his life for us, his sheep; and he took it up again for us, his sheep.

But there's still more in these eight verses, as we read, "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 and one shepherd." (John 10:16) What's that all about? I've stated before that one of the things I love about John's Gospel is its inclusivity. I have frequently highlighted how Jesus' conversation with a Samaritan woman at the well in chapter four is a prime example of how Jesus was the Christ for all people, not just the Jews; and yes, today I might say not just those whom we would call "model Christians." And today it seems that there are many differing opinions of how one might define a "model Christian." But what does Jesus say? There are other sheep that aren't part of this fold. But there will be one flock, and one shepherd."

Friends, when I read that, my first thought was: "There is not us and them; there is just us." We are all members of that flock we might call the family of God. I don't care if you're Christian or Jewish or Muslim or Hindi or Buddhist or Atheist. I don't care if you're Black or White or Brown or Red or Yellow. I don't care if you're young or old or somewhere in between. I don't care if you're male or female. I don't care if you're Gay or Straight or Transgendered or Bisexual. We are all members of the family of God. We are all members of that same flock; and God loves all his sheep.

How many times have I stated that, for me, the most special words in the entire communion liturgy are those words of the prayer: "By your Spirit, make us one with Christ, one with each other, and on in ministry to all the world." Jesus said, "There will be one flock and one shepherd."

When I was in college, I had a neighbor who was Japanese by ethnicity and Buddhist by faith. Like most college students, I did not have a lot of money. I was a poor music student; so I would ask my neighbor who was a professional mechanic to service my car. He'd replace the spark plugs and points (yes, back then cars had points), rotor, distributor cap, filters, etc. He'd adjust the timing, change the oil, sometimes, service the brakes – whatever was needed to keep the car in good working order. Naturally, when he was finished, I'd ask what I owed him; and he'd say, "Nothing." Usually a minor discussion would ensue, and he would agree to accept a small payment for the parts, but nothing for his labor. Then one day, after fixing my car, I asked, "What do I owe you?" and he responded, "Mark, why won't you let me be a good Buddhist, and fix your car out

of love. I don't want your money." I tell you, that man was at much a member of the family of God and flock of Jesus Christ as anyone I've ever known; even though Jesus Christ was not formally a part of his tradition. He felt a call to fix the car of a college student without pay, a call that was Spirit driven, a call that was love driven, and we will hear next week how God is the source of all love.

Jesus said, "There are other sheep that don't belong to this pen. I must lead them too. They will listen to my voice, and there where be one flock and one shepherd." And this brings me back to where we started. Yes, I believe God is calling every person, but most importantly I believe that God is calling you and God is calling me. And so I ask again, as I have asked so many times before, "To what are we being called?" I strongly believe that *Our Faithful Journey* is a call. I believe that "Our Guiding Principles" which are now printed in our bulletin every week, are a call. Yes, I believe that the Holy Spirit is leading this church in what is truly a "faithful journey," and I believe it's important to not lose sight of that journey.

That being said, I also believe that we all have an over-arching call, a call to recognize every other person on this planet is a part of that one holy flock of God. How often I wish and indeed I pray that our leadership in Columbus and in Washington would come to recognize that there is no "We and They" there is only "Us" – all of us are members of that one flock lead by one Shepherd. But each of us, as individuals must also make that same recognition – as we join together to answer the call of the Good Shepherd – a call to faith and fellowship, a call to love and service, a call to peace.

Praise be to God for a Good Shepherd that would lay down his life for the sheep and take it up again. Praise be to God for the call of that Shepherd to a life of love and joy and peace. May each of us have the faith and the strength and the courage to answer the call.

Let us pray. . .

Lord, you are the Good Shepherd and  
you call us by name.  
Give us the faith, the strength, and the courage  
to follow where you lead,  
every day of our lives.  
Amen.

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