

**Easter 4 (Good Shepherd Sunday), Year B**  
**John 10:11-18**

**YOU ARE THE GOOD SHEPHERD'S PERSONAL CONCERN**

There was a grazier named Grace who managed a sheep station near Renmark in South Australia. After her sheepdog died, she trained her pet sheep to lead her flocks. She gave each one a name. With their next meal at stake, they quickly learned to respond to her call and would do almost anything she wanted them to do. Once trained, her pet sheep were put into a flock to obey her bidding. Whenever Grace wanted to move sheep, she called her pets by name and the whole flock would follow them. Like sheep.

Grace could laugh at her way of leading sheep from the front instead of herding them from behind. Grace knew her sheep and called them by name, just as Christ, our Good Shepherd does. Christ risks all, even His life, for you. He knows you by name. You are His personal concern. The image of the Good Shepherd is a very comforting one to those going through difficult times. Many Christians today find the warm and tender associations of the Good Shepherd strengthen their relationship with God. Sheep owners treasure their flock and treat them much, much better than they deserve.

Sheep depicted in stained-glass windows in churches are all too often depicted in a clean and tidy condition, so unlike their appearance on our farms. Lost lambs especially look scraggly, mud-caked and droopy. Jesus uses the image of the “model” or “winsome” Shepherd – for that is what the word for “Good” used here means. Jesus uses this image to show us the extent to which He will go on our behalf. He will seek out and rescue the untidy, the unattractive, and the messed up, in order to bring them into His fold.

Your Good Shepherd's love for you is evident every time He speaks about you. Your future is dearer to Him than His own life. He knows

what makes you tick, your strengths and weaknesses. In the Bible, to “know” someone means to care for them and to meet their needs in a deeply personal way. None of us are as self-sufficient as we think we are. We all have needs that only Christ our Good Shepherd can meet. We also, like sheep, have a tendency to stray from or neglect what’s best for us.

Jesus uses the problems we can’t handle on our own to draw us close to Him, so He can care for us according to His unsurpassed wisdom, and in the interests of our eternal future. Your Good Shepherd knows you better than you know yourself. He knows your unique weaknesses and temptations that no one else knows. And He treasures you all the more for your uniqueness. To outsiders, sheep all look alike. But not so to their shepherds who love and treasure them. Just as each part of our bodies is of value because of its uniqueness, because of the difference from other parts of our body, so too, your Creator created you as an individual, in the way you would be of greatest value to Him.

Jesus’ most gracious promise is that no matter how lousy or depressed you feel, He will never abandon you. He never tires of helping you, when you desperately need His help; He never grows tired of forgiving you when you plead for His mercy. Your Good Shepherd lets no greater challenges and burdens come your way than He knows you can handle **with His help**. Life’s tough circumstances are easier to bear as you share them with your Lord.

With unwearied patience, the good Lord bears with our follies and misguided actions. Forgiveness means that Jesus focuses on your potential for the future, on all the wonderful things you can still do for Him, rather than on your past failures. Because of this, Jesus continues to inspire and motivate millions of Christians all over the world, to give their lives to serve Him fully.

Christ as the Good Shepherd is one of the most common ways our Lord is depicted in the earliest Christian art. Jesus is painted as a youthful, beardless young man, with a radiant glow of newness and

freshness. These paintings celebrate both the way He had made His followers feel brand new, and the way Christ's coming made the world seem young and new again. To a society weary and worn out by wars and rumours of war, the first portraits of our Lord as the Good Shepherd announce that a brand new start in life is possible. When Jesus says: "**I am the Good Shepherd**", He is emphasizing His unique place in our daily lives. This "**I am**" affirmation focuses on our Lord in the fullest possibly way. "**I am**" is how God speaks about Himself in the Old Testament. Jesus declares that He offers us the life that only God can give.

**"I know My own and My own know Me"**, Jesus says. We get to know Jesus by listening to His Word. Sheep are known for their acute hearing. They can pick up and respond positively to their master's voice when half a dozen other shepherds are speaking at the same time. Wise sheep keep within earshot of their master's voice. God created us with two ears and one mouth, because we are to listen twice as much as we speak. "**Be keen to listen and slow to speak**", the Bible says. When we listen, we learn. "**Learn from Me**", Jesus says. His words seek to transform our hearts and minds, our thoughts and our actions. But this transformation happens gradually, week by week.

Sunday by Sunday, Jesus has a message for you, tailor-made to your needs for the coming week. Like good doctors, your Good Shepherd may tell you something you'd prefer not to hear, and ask you to do something that goes against the grain, against your natural inclination, but seeks to keep you spiritually healthy. We don't go to a doctor to simply hear nice things, do we? Jesus says: "**Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with Me (Revelation 3:20).**" Jesus can do wonderful things for those who keep company with Him every day. The more time you spend with Him, the more He can do for you. We call Him "Good" because He continues caring for you even when you forget Him. The nearer you draw to Jesus, the less you think about yourself, and the more you think of others.

Jesus is in the business of gathering in those who have drifted away from His fold. **“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 (John 10:16).”** Let others know how good your Saviour has been to you. The story of His goodness to you has just begun. His goodness will continue for the rest of your life. **“Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life (Psalm 23:6).”**

We heard earlier of Grace the grazier whose pet lambs lead the flock. The Bible tells us that on the Last Day, Christ the Lamb will be our Guide forever. **“For the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their Shepherd. And He will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes (Revelation 7:17).”**

Now isn't that worth looking forward to? On that never-ending Day, your faithfulness in this life to the Good Shepherd will be vindicated and blessed a million times over.

**“Now may 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, make you complete in everything good so that you may do His will, working among us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen. (Hebrews 13:20-21).”**