

I AM...

The Good Shepherd

Frankton – 2/28/16

Scripture: John 10.11-18 I AM the Good Shepherd

Proposition: The Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep so they can live.

We seem to always be running on a treadmill – constantly trying to do this and that. To do more in less time. To get just one more thing done on our daily to-do list. So, with apologies to Mery Budd who wrote this, I give you a knock off of Psalm 23:

The clock is my dictator, I shall not rest.

It makes me lie down only when exhausted.

It leads me into deep depression. It hounds my soul.

It leads me in circles of frenzy, for activities sake.

Even though I run frantically from task to task, I will never get it all done,

For my ideal is with me.

Deadlines and my need for approval, they drive me.

They demand performance from me, beyond the limits of my schedule.

They anoint my head with migraines, my in-basket overflows.

Surely fatigue and time pressures shall follow me all the days of my life.

And I will dwell in the bonds of frustration forever

We are continuing a Lenten sermon series that I have titled: [SLIDE] I AM. For the seven Sundays in Lent, we are going to study the “I am” sayings of Jesus that occur in the gospel of John. In seven different situations, Jesus refers to himself as something by saying “I am...” Here’s the list: light, gate, good shepherd, bread, true vine, way, and resurrection. As we talked about last week, Jesus has been gaining more attention by making some bold claims. He was using the Hebrew word haya (hay-yaw). God used this name when He introduced himself to Moses. Jesus is boldly claiming to be equal with God. He is claiming to be God. So here we go with our third sermon: “I am” the Good Shepherd.

Jesus has declared himself to be the Light of the World, and the secure Gate for the sheep. It is right after the gate scripture, while he is still standing in the green pasture that he makes this declaration: [SLIDE] *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep.* [11] Jesus states that he is the better, most excellent shepherd, a claim that only he can make. He is proclaiming to be a greater shepherd than Abraham, Moses, or David. He is informing the crowd that all though these fine shepherds spent their lives caring for their sheep, they never actually died for their sheep. The better, most excellent shepherd will soon physically die for his sheep.

So, I want to take a look at what a Good Shepherd does. When David wrote the 23rd Psalm, he prophetically illustrated the beauty of the good shepherd. [SLIDE] *The Lord is my shepherd; I have all that I need.* [PS 23.1] As much as I love you all of you, I am not your good shepherd. Only Jesus can fulfill the role of the good shepherd. While it is true that I have been commissioned

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to pastor (shepherd) you, we need to remember that I too am just a sheep. You and I are cut from the same cloth: we are the created we are not the creator. We are sheep and Jesus is our shepherd. And because Jesus is our shepherd, our needs are met. We are fed by his word. He tends to our wounds. He cares for us when maybe no one else will. Jesus is our good shepherd.

[SLIDE] *He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me beside peaceful streams.* [PS 23.2] Green meadows are a picture of tranquility. They are exactly opposite of the person described in the Psalm 23 knock-off that I read at the start of the sermon. In times of stress Jesus encourages us to rest in his presence. He desires for us to be still and listen to his voice. He knows when we've had too much, so he leads us. He does not drive us or push us. We don't curry Christ's favor with the things we do. We are not to be performance driven to gather favor with our good shepherd. Remember Mary and Martha: Martha slaved away in the kitchen hoping to curry favor while Mary sat at Jesus' feet. We are simply called to follow him.

When we follow him, we find peaceful streams. We know that we, and sheep, will die without water. Sheep will drown in swift running water. Their wool is like a sponge and will weigh them down. Sheep won't even drink if the water is running too fast. They'll die of thirst next to a fast moving stream. The good shepherd finds still water so the sheep can drink without fear. The same can be said for us. Jesus will lead us to peaceful streams so that we can have water to live, living water to live.

[SLIDE] *He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths, bringing honor to his name.* [PS 23.3] The good shepherd loves his sheep and renews them daily. He is not critical but rather affirming. He does not discourage but rather encourages. He does not condemn but rather instructs. He does not curse them but rather blesses them. He does not allow the wolves to devour them but rather protects them. He does not allow them to scatter but rather seeks them. He guides us along the right paths so that we can bring honor to his name. If what we are doing does not bring honor to his name then we are no longer on the right path and we need to listen to the good shepherd who will guide us to the right path.

[SLIDE] *Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me.* [PS 23.4] We have the comfort of knowing that in the darkest valleys of our life, our good shepherd is still beside us, leading us out. He has promised never to leave us or forsake us. We have the promise of his rod, not to beat us but to protect us from our enemies. We have the promise of his staff with a hook on the end as an aid to pull us from the pit when we fall into one.

[SLIDE] *You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies. You honor me by anointing my head with oil. My cup overflows with blessings.* [PS 23.5] Today the good shepherd has prepared a feast for you. Today, I ask the Holy Spirit to remove the stones and thorn bushes that represent the enemy so that you could feast today. I ask him to remove all the things, distractions, that get in the way of our relationship with our Good Shepherd. I ask so that you can come freely to him. But you must be willing to eat. Like a finicky cat that turns up her nose at her master's offering for dinner, we sometimes turn up our nose at what God offers us. We tell God, "But that's not what I want. I want this instead." We need to remember that God knows best for us. We need to eat from the plate he offers us.

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Shepherds anointed the head of the sheep with oil and spice to protect them from harmful insects. It proved their value to the shepherd. The good shepherd anoints our heads with oil to give us a sense of worth. How much are we worth? We are worth enough for the good shepherd to sacrifice his life for us. For that, our cup of blessings overflow.

[SLIDE] *Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the Lord forever.* [PS 23.6] We have the promise of the good shepherd's goodness and unfailing love for as long as we are in the pasture. But we also have the promise of leaving the pasture and finding permanent residence in the house of the good shepherd.

The story is told of a preacher who was talking to the children about sheep. He said that sheep weren't very clever and needed lots of guidance and that a shepherd's job was to stay close to the sheep, protect them from wild animals and keep them from wandering off and doing foolish things that would get them hurt or killed. He pointed to the children in the room, said that they were the sheep, and needed lots of guidance. Then the minister put his hands out to the side, palms up in a dramatic gesture, and with raised eyebrows said to the children, "If you are the sheep then who is the shepherd?" He was pretty obviously indicating himself. A silence of a few seconds followed. Then a young visitor said, "Jesus, Jesus is the shepherd." The young minister, obviously caught by surprise, said to the boy, "Well, then, who am I?" The little boy frowned thoughtfully and then said with a shrug, "I guess you must be a sheep dog."

I am very certain what my role as pastor has been over the last 11 years. I know what role your next pastor will be and what my role as pastor of Loogootee UMC will be. The pastor's role is that of sheep dog. Jesus is the shepherd; I am the sheep dog. I am just a tool Christ uses to keep his flock moving in the right direction. To keep ones from straying too far away from the rest of the flock; to rescue those who have fallen into trouble, or trouble has found them. I know my role. I'm a sheep dog.

Jesus ends this section of scripture with the following words: [SLIDE] *I am the good shepherd...So I sacrifice my life for the sheep.* [14-15] Again Jesus emphasizes the fact that He is the better, most excellent shepherd, a claim that only he can make. He says "I know my sheep and I know my father. My sheep know me and my Father knows me." The word "know" implies an intimacy of recognition and understanding. Jesus is comparing his intimate relationship with the heavenly Father to be equal to his relationship with his sheep. Jesus knows you as God knows you for they are one and the same.

So go on, listen to the one who knows you. Allow Christ to be your shepherd. Re-submit yourself to the Good Shepherd. And if you haven't submitted to the Good Shepherd, now is the chance. As we sing our next song, If you would like, come on up front here and re-submit your life to the Good Shepherd or if you would like to submit your life to the Good Shepherd for the very first time. He's waiting for you. And if you need help, this sheep dog is here to help you.

