

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church  
Shobonier, Illinois  
Easter 4B  
April 21, 2024  
John 10:11-18

### The Laying Down His Life Shepherd

[Jesus said,] “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. . . . 14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, 15 . . . and I lay down my life for the sheep.” (John 10:11, 14, 15 ESV)

Dearly beloved lambs of the Good Shepherd,

Alleluia! Christ is risen! [He is risen again! Alleluia!]

Today we hear Jesus say, “I am the good shepherd.” How wonderful that is! Yet, what does it mean? In what way is Jesus the good shepherd? He tells us. “The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”

Now, we probably don’t think of our Good Shepherd in those terms much. Rather, we usually think of Jesus as our Good Shepherd in the description of the Twenty-third Psalm. He is with us; He guides us; He leads us; He protects us. Even in the valley of the shadow of death we will fear no evil. That’s all very beautiful, but Jesus is the one who defines what all that means. He lays down His life for us. That’s how we have the life in which we go forward and in which we know that His goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our lives and that we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd in that everything that is good and pure and perfect and loving is embodied in Him. And we see that in the singular act of Him laying down His life for us. That’s more of a blessing than we can imagine because there’s no one else who will do that. Indeed, no one else can. Only the one who is pure and good and holy and perfect can.

We are sheep who have gone astray. Every one of us has gone our own way. Our straying from the pasture of our Lord’s grace and care leads us into destruction. Now, it’s hard to think about this because we’re so caught up in the here and now. We’re consumed with our daily problems and stresses. We’re concerned and worried about what’s coming down the road for us financially or health-wise or with our children or with our aging parents. We struggle with coming to terms with our trials, but don’t often think about what our sin and straying from God brings about for us. Maybe it’s because we can’t comprehend what that will actually be like. We may know hell in an intellectual way, that it’s really bad. But it’s hard to come to terms with the

fact that our straying from our Lord brings us to hell and that it's separation from Him forever and torment forever.

Jesus the Good Shepherd does not lay down His life for us to help us out. He does it to save us. This isn't sheep caught in the fence, this is us under the condemnation of eternal suffering in hell. Jesus is the only one who is pure and good and loving and able to rescue us from that condemnation. That's why He's telling us that He is the Good Shepherd. That He lays down His life for the sheep.

Our sinfulness and our living in the fallen world has so corrupted us that we convince ourselves that we're not really that bad despite the mistakes and even the sins we have committed. After all, are our sins so bad that we deserve to be eternally separated from God and condemned to eternal torment? Absolutely! Don't be led astray by thinking it isn't so.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd and then there are the hired hands. They don't truly love the sheep. They love themselves. That's not to say that they're not nice people. It's not even to say that they don't do a lot of wonderful things to help people. But they are not the Shepherd and so don't truly love the sheep. How do we know this? Jesus says they flee when the wolf comes. They don't lay down their lives for the sheep. Jesus does. He is the Good Shepherd. And He sends under-shepherds to care for His flock the Church.

Today's first reading shows us what the hired hands in the Church look like. The religious leaders were actively working to prevent the apostles from proclaiming Jesus and His death and resurrection (Acts 4:1-12). The apostles were the faithful shepherds Jesus sent to serve. They were willing to lay down their lives for the sheep too, in that they would suffer being thrown in prison or being tortured or even being killed, rather than waver in confessing and proclaiming the Gospel, Jesus' death and resurrection for the sin of the world. The religious leaders were the hired hands. They were cowards. They sought their own welfare instead of truly loving God's people. In fact, they were no shepherds at all, but wolves, intent on destroying the flock of God. That's why they so attacked Christ and tried to stop the apostles' work of proclaiming the Gospel.

Jesus is THE Good Shepherd, not just A good shepherd. He lays down His life for us. He knows us. In a remarkable work, He gives to us a gift in which we also know Him. I know My own and My own know Me. It isn't just that we know that He's God and that He saved us. He loves us purely because of His love and grace for us. We love Him in return purely out of His grace and love for us in laying down His life for us. This is why Jesus' knowing us is not just a thing in which He's a really good shepherd and therefore knows all of His sheep really well; as a good coach would know each player and what makes each of them tick individually. It's that He knows us in the way the Father knows Him and He knows the Father. God the Father loves His only-begotten Son with an eternal and perfect love. It's wholly selfless and abounding. This is

how Jesus knows us and loves us. It's the kind of love that Jesus says moved His Father to send Him, Jesus, to lay down His life for the sheep.

It's the kind of love that moves Him to do this not just for those who are His own but for everyone, as He says, "I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd." Jesus laid down His life for all. Yet, not everyone is in His flock. Not everyone believes and trusts in Him alone for life and salvation. So, how does Jesus bring others into His fold? Through the means of His grace – His Word, His Baptism, His Absolution, His Body and Blood – the same way you were brought in. That's how He delivers the fruit of His death and resurrection to us and to others.

The Good Shepherd is truly good. You do not need to get your act together before He loves you. He died and rose for you. You do not need to figure out how you can straighten out other people's lives before Jesus loves them. He died and rose for them too. Rather as Jesus' love for us flows through us toward others, He will do His work. What a blessing it is to know that when God uses you to help people, and even more, to truly love them, that it's Him doing the work, Him loving them, Him giving you what you need to love them by reminding you that, as He said, "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again."

Don't rely on yourself. He's the one who laid down His life of His own accord. He's the one who had the authority to take it up again and rise from death. Having laid down His life for you and having risen from the grave you have new and eternal life, new and eternal opportunities to receive more and more of His grace and love and to share grace and love others.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! [He is risen again! Alleluia!] Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener  
Pastor

Immanuel Lutheran Church of Augsburg  
1297 E 900 Ave.  
Shobonier, IL 62885  
church: (618) 846-8383  
personal cell: 330-204-4180