

April 22, 2018 John 10:11-18 "Truly Known"  
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Perhaps there is no metaphor or image of Scripture more sanitized and sentimentalized and made into a fuzzy-wuzzy nothing than Jesus as the good shepherd. Not many of us these days have direct experience with sheep, although perhaps some of you have raised sheep in the past. Most of us are sheep illiterate. And yet the images of sheep and shepherd are prolific in the Scriptures:

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The good shepherd  
The lost sheep  
The Lord is my shepherd  
We are all like sheep that have gone

The Great Shepherd of the sheep  
And to Peter: tend and feed my sheep We are sent out as sheep  
in the midst of

wolves  
where called shepherds

And the political leaders of Israel

And they failed their calling so God took on the role of the  
Shepherd of Israel

Jesus describes himself as the *good shepherd*. This is not a sentimentalized or sanitized image, but the word *good* implies that Jesus is the true, honest, valuable model for the role of the

shepherd. As the good shepherd, Jesus willingly lays down his life for the sheep. It is that attitude and action of Jesus that God wants to impress upon us this morning.

Jesus not only gave his life, laid down his life for you on the cross, but he lays down his life for us every moment of the day. Have you thought of Jesus laying down his life for you right now? How does Jesus do that?

I visited a person who was terminally ill and I asked him the perennial question: “How are you doing?” His reply was truthful. He said, “When I am asked that question I usually say, ‘I’m doing ok,’ but I am really lying through my teeth. To you, I’ll tell the truth.” He then went on to tell me how he was progressively getting worse.

We pick and choose whom we will let into our lives, who will get the privilege of really *knowing* us. Most of the businesses with which we deal, have us in their computer with some number. We are merely social security numbers or student identification numbers, but to our Good Shepherd we are more than a number, we are intimately known. We are known by name.

In my younger years, much younger years, even before seminary, I worked in a training program at Glendale Lutheran Church in Burien, WA. I got to know identical twin boys. They were in high school at the time. One day, as these young men were leaving worship, I took the chance at calling them by name, but I missed. One of them, angrily spoke up: “My name isn’t..... It’s ..... Nobody knows my name. Everybody gets it

wrong.” It is still a fear that I have, calling people by the wrong name.

Jesus does not mess up our name, for he knows us inside and out. Jesus lays down his life for us every day of the week, as he knows us intimately. He knows our idiosyncrasies, our fears, our failures, our true hopes and our dreams. He knows who we truly are, not just who we portray to the public, not just our facade that we present in order to look good.

When I do not really understand myself, Jesus understands me. When I put my foot in my mouth, for the millionth time, and I cannot really understand why I am so impulsive-so Peter-like-Jesus knows and still accepts me. Jesus knows my dark side, the parts of me that are even hidden from myself. He knows my gifts and my abilities, my potential. He knows me and still gives himself to me and for me. That is true love. When it says that Jesus willingly gives himself up for us, in part, at least to me, it means that he truly loves us and shows us that love by knowing us and accepting us.

It takes a great deal of work to really get to know a person. As I did pre-marriage counseling, it dawned on me how a young couple, who spends hours and hours talking to each other, still doesn't really know each other. Nancy and I have spent hours talking, sharing in deep, deep ways, but to truly know each other it takes time, takes a life-time.

Charlie Brown said, “There’s no problem so big that you can’t run from it,” but to really know each other is to stick together in all weather, in all our problems and challenges.

Margaret Mead wrote that one of the most serious things that has happened in the United States is that people “enter marriage with the idea it is terminable.” But our Good Shepherd does not run from us when our dark side, our weaknesses and even our sin is revealed. God knows us, and forgives us.

Now we think of the shepherd as one who cares for the sheep by bringing them to safe pastures and abundant water supplies. Jesus, our Good Shepherd, does provide for us and protects us, but he cares for us on a much deeper level. The following story relays part of our Shepherd’s care for us:

One day the doorbell rang and there stood a woman’s beloved brother. It was a delightful surprise to the woman. Her brother was an executive of an international petroleum company and he was extremely busy. He stayed and visited for a few hours and then got up to say good-bye. Tears began to slide down the woman’s face. He asked her why she was crying. “Because I simply don’t want you to go,” was her reply. He gave a surprised look and then went to the phone and left a message for the pilot of his company’s plane. He stayed with his sister for two days, but all the time the sister had a nagging feeling that she had caused her brother a great inconvenience.

Some time later the brother received an important award for his contributions to the oil industry. A reporter asked

him at the time, “Is this the greatest honor that you’ve received?”

“No,” he said, “my sister gave me my greatest honor the day she cried because she didn’t want me to leave. That’s the only time in my life anyone ever cried because they didn’t want me to leave. It was then that I discovered the most precious gift one human being can ever bestow on another is to let a person know that he/she is really needed and loved that much.”

Jesus, as our Good Shepherd, knows us and cares for us at the deepest, most intimate levels of our being. He sits down and has coffee with us, walks the early morning walk with us, stays awake in the stillness of the night when we cannot sleep. Jesus gives us of his time, his presence, his loving care, and even more than all of that he tells us that we are his beloved.

An elderly man on his golden wedding anniversary was asked, “And do you still love your wife after all those years together?” His reply was, “Yes, sir, indeed I do. In fact, there are times when I have a real hard job not telling her so!” Some men have a hard time expressing love, but our Good Shepherd never tires of telling us how much he loves us.

We are fully known, fully loved and fully cared for by Jesus, our Good Shepherd. Take a moment, take your life-

time and allowed yourself to be loved up by your Good Shephe