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# Know Your Shepherd

Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 26 April 2026

Acts 2:42-47 • John 10:1-10

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May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

The beautiful Psalm 23 begins with the words: “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” This line encapsulates the entire Gospel today. Jesus is our great leader and Lord and we may look to him for everything. We are the sheep of his pasture. We are not sheep as people use the word today, people who follow someone or something blindly; we are not blind sheep. We know our shepherd and we know that our shepherd loves us. Our shepherd supplies us with everything we need, and so we do not want or need anything else. Jesus is all.

Above all, Jesus protects us. In the figure he uses, the sheep are protected from wolves or from thieves who steal them away. They are safe in the sheep pen. The pen has one entrance, and Jesus the shepherd blocks it to keep any dangers from reaching them. When they are in the pen, they are safe; and when it is time to leave the pen, the shepherd calls them. There may be other sheep in the

pen too, but they will not follow Jesus, for they do not know his voice. Only Jesus' sheep will respond to his voice.

This seems simplistic but it says so much:

- Some sheep belong to Jesus, and others do not. In the world of people, only some follow Jesus. They have made a specific decision and a commitment to follow him. Jesus has called them to come into his flock, and they have answered positively. Just as the Virgin Mary answered 'yes' to the angel Gabriel who came to tell her she would give birth to the Messiah, all of us here have given a big 'yes' to Jesus, and so we are his. So when Jesus calls on us, we hear the call. Maybe we don't get called very often; some do, some don't. But we will know it when it happens, for we know his voice. Other people, who do not know Jesus, continue their lives without him, not having been called by him, or having been called and not responding in a positive way. They will ignore Jesus, for they have chosen other shepherds. We have chosen the Good Shepherd.
- This means that we are not sheep in the modern sense of the word, as one who blindly follows another. We are not blind. We see the world before us, and we choose to follow Christ, as he has revealed himself to us through the Bible and through prayer. That choice has consequences. It means that we are not free to serve only ourselves. We do not satisfy our own needs only. We choose to put others first, and give up selfish actions. Paul spoke of this as choosing the Spirit over the flesh, that is, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit over things that only please ourselves. Remember the works of the flesh he spoke about: things like hatred, jealousy, anger, and selfish ambition. Following Christ means we have the gifts of the Spirit: things like love, joy, patience and gentleness. We are free to choose these things, in giving our lives to Jesus Christ.
- Jesus speaks of himself as the gate. In his time, shepherds often lay down across the opening to the pen at night, so that they would know if a sheep tried to get out, or a thief tried to get in. In a small holding, the sheep might be penned in a courtyard of the family's house. So anyone who comes into the pen must be admitted by the shepherd. Jesus extends this, using the word 'saved': "Whoever enters by me will be saved" (John 10:9). So we are reminded that salvation comes through Jesus. Whoever enters the gate of the pen through Jesus may also enter through the gates of heaven, which Jesus opened for us when he was resurrected.
- We can go a bit farther: We are more than sheep. We can also be the gate. The Gospel speaks of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, but we too should become shepherds, after the pattern of Jesus. Each in our own way may guide, care for and nurture others. We pass on the love we receive from

Jesus. We as believers help to be the gate with Jesus, as we help to introduce others to the Gospel. That is one of the wonderful things about our God: that we can help in God's plan eventually to bring everyone to salvation.

- And along the way to salvation, we are to have life abundantly. Abundant life for a sheep is perhaps really rich green pastures. For us, it is personal fulfilment, loving family and friends, and communion with Jesus.
- The thief, who Jesus says steals and kills and destroys, is of course Satan, who constantly works to counter and undermine all that Jesus does. Satan can steal our joy and diminish our lives. But I think not only Satan is meant here. Anything which gets between us and our shepherd can keep us from enjoying the abundant life Jesus promises.

In a country where the sheep outnumber the people about 4 ½ to 1, we should understand sheep! There are about 23 million of them here now. When I first visited New Zealand, back in the 1970s, I was told there were 3 million people and 30 million sheep — a ratio of 10 to 1. The people are winning. (Just FYI, there are almost 5 million dairy cows.) Whenever I drive outside Christchurch and see a flock of sheep, I think about this Gospel passage. The model for sheep-herding is not the same as it was in Jesus' day, but the modern shepherd still protects his sheep from harm. Not from wolves, fortunately; we don't have those here. But there are other risks to sheep.

I think I relate better to this picture of Jesus than I do to the true vine, or to the image of Jesus as King. The image of a shepherd and his sheep puts us in correct relation to Jesus, who knows what is best for us far better than we know ourselves. Let us happily serve our shepherd Jesus, and when he calls us and we recognise his voice, let us follow him in love and faith. Amen.