

John 10:11-18. ¹¹ "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³ The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. ¹⁴ "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. ¹⁷ The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."

Jesus is the Good Shepherd

1. He gives his life for his flock
2. He knows and cares for his sheep
3. He gathers precious souls into care

In the Greek the word is ποιμήν. In the Latin the word is perhaps a bit more familiar: pastor. Pastor means shepherd. With that knowledge it becomes clearer that the title pastor is more than a mere title, for this is more than a formal agreement or an arbitrary arrangement. This goes beyond your typical hired position. This is one who watches over and tends to those put under his care. The role of a pastor is important part of an important relationship. This is the relationship that God has established for the spiritual protection and well-being of his church. Pastor and people, shepherd and flock; to have a pastor that you can trust and go to is a blessing; to be called to be a pastor, to serve the Lord as such a keeper of souls is a tremendous responsibility. And what makes it special is that it is carried out in love that has modeled so perfectly by our Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

Jesus cares for us. He is the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for his precious sheep. He loved each one of us so much that he came into this world and laid down his life for our eternal salvation and our spiritual care. In fact, he placed his life on the line each day as our Good Shepherd when he lived here on this earth. He lived each moment to take care of our need for perfection. As our Good Shepherd, our Good Pastor, He taught with words of clarity and power and authority so that we

might know our LORD and grow in our relationship to God. And then in his great love he exceeded the expectations of any earthly shepherd or pastor as he laid down his life to pay for our sin, to reconcile us to our heavenly Father, to bring sinners so graciously close to our holy God. No one took his life, but the Good Shepherd gave it, he laid it down, to save and protect us his sheep. And in that same love he raised his life up again to assure us of his ongoing care until he gives us the gift of eternal life and the quiet pastures of heaven. Although he no longer dwells among us he assures us that he knows each one of us and he hears *your* voice. Even though he is our risen and ascended Lord who dwells in the glory of heaven, Jesus made sure that there would be those physically here on earth that would tend to us and our to spiritual needs by bringing us his word.

As Christ rules over and watches over all things from heaven as our Good Shepherd, he cares for us so much that he saw to it that the church would be tended to and cared for by those that Bible sometimes calls under-shepherds and overseers. Today we might call them pastors and teachers. The role of a pastors or teacher is to be viewed as more than a hired position, but they have been called to serve in the spiritual care of our Savior's precious little lambs and his beloved sheep. The Lord Jesus sent his disciple Peter out to feed his lambs, feed his sheep, and in turn the apostle Peter urged fellow workers in the gospel ministry to ***“Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing” (1 Peter 5:2).*** Pastors and teachers and those called and appointed to any position of spiritual care should carry out their duties with love and with willing service as we model the loving example of our Good Shepherd, our Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

At the Learning Center a few weeks ago Pastor Luetke worked with our director Miss Punke in an exercise that demonstrated the care and the concern of those who are placed in positions of spiritual care. He had the children at Little Lambs stand behind a barrier so that Miss Punke could not see them. Then each child took their turn speaking. The point of the exercise was to see if she knew the voice of each one of her Little Lambs. And sure enough, even though she could not see them she knew each one of their voices. Miss Punke has been placed in a position of physical and spiritual care and each one of those little lambs is precious to her as she carries out her role as director and teacher. Admittedly as the center grows it becomes a bit more of a challenge to know each child, and the parents, as well as she once did. But as one entrusted with the care of precious little souls, she views this position of care as a blessed responsibility and privilege.

Now take that fun exercise and illustration, and magnify it exponentially. Consider the intelligence, the love, the concern, and the masterful care of our Savior Jesus Christ. He is concerned about each one of us. He knows you. Out of all of his

children, out of all the Christians that this world holds - and has ever held - he knows you too. He knows your problems. He knows what you are facing. He knows your voice.

As you cry out to him in prayer and you sing your songs of thanks and praise, He knows your voice. As you talk with him as you walk alongside him, as you voice your concerns and frustrations. He knows your pain. He knows what you are going through. He hears when we laugh and rejoice, he knows when you are so sad or angry that you have no words to say. He knows you and he hears you when you sing his praises and when you call out to him in prayer. And he wants you to know him as he knows you. He wants you to listen to his voice as he listens to your voice. ¹⁴ ***"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—*** ¹⁵ ***just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.*** ¹⁶ ***I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.*** He wants us, as well as many others, to know who God is and what he has done to save us. He wants all his people to listen to his word of truth, to enjoy a personal relationship with him. He wants as many as possible to be as close to the Father as he is with the Father. And so he leads us into his word and then by faith our God leads us to trust in Jesus more and more as our Good Shepherd. He is the one that we can trust, the one to whom we can go at anytime. What a blessing to have such a relationship with our Shepherd, Jesus!

This is more than an formal agreement, or mindless allegiance, or a generic arrangement; this is a personal relationship. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep because he cares for us. He knows us. He loves us. Unlike a hired man, who is connected only by a wage or a paycheck to his position, the Good Shepherd has a deep connection with his sheep. He is devoted to us and it clearly shows. He made us and then he watches over and knows us. He lived as one of us. He cares for us. He is faithful. He does not desert us, leave us, our forsake us, but he loves us with such love that would even give his own life to keep us safe from spiritual harm. He lays down his own life so that we were not separated from God. He gives his life so that we could be reconciled with God, and united with God for all eternity. He gave his life so that we might be united with God's dear people in this life and for all time. As our Good Shepherd explains, ***there shall be one flock and one shepherd.***

Notice what the horrible intention of the wolf attack is; it is the scattering the flock. The wolves of this world, and the leader of such wolf packs, the devil himself, would want nothing more than to separate sheep from their Shepherd Jesus Christ. And so that crafty and dangerous wolf tries to use the pains and the troubles that can arise in our life in an effort to separate us. The devil uses the guilt of our sin, or even the guilt of being absent from worship for a time, to make us hesitant to unite with

fellow believers. The wolves of this world try to use anything to drive a wedge between God's people. He uses even petty things like personal preferences and differences in opinion and personality clashes to cause any reason for strife and separation. Wolves are sent by Satan to twist doctrine in order to drive people down a different path and away from God in order to separate believers from the flock and pry them away from God in an effort to seize them and snatch as many as he can. Instead of finding the refuge and the help and the aid and support that God wishes for us within the flock, Jesus precious little lambs and sheep are sometimes isolated for one reason or another and are left vulnerable and exposed because of sin.

Hence a wonderful thing that the Good Shepherd does is to bring us together and keep us together. He came to lay down his life so that we might be reconciled to God. And now that we are brought near to God we are also gathered into his flock, the church. Within his church on earth he establishes and utilizes Christian congregations to continue in this care of our souls. Within those congregations the Lord Jesus uses faithful pastors to keep us close to him as they teach God's people about our Savior and his incredible love. The Lord Jesus uses pastors to bring us closer to God, to guide his flock on the way that follows our Savior will; to teach and even to rebuke God's precious sheep when we go astray, as those pastors share and explain and rightly apply his Holy Word. Our Good Shepherd Jesus utilizes pastors and teachers and elders and others within his church to keep us safe within his fold. Our Good Shepherd may not dwell on this earth anymore, he might not walk beside us physically, but he still cares for his sheep through his under-shepherds, through his overseers here on this earth. What a blessing it is to have faithful pastors and teachers and elders! We pray that our Good Shepherd may continue to bless his church with such faithful shepherds!

Today we are glad to welcome several new members here at St. Matthew's. May we see this as the blessing that it is! Our Lord and Savior has reached out and touched the lives of these precious souls with his word, and has gathered a few more into this family of believers, a flock of his dear sheep, who listen to his voice and follow our Savior's ways.

Dear friends, this is more than some arbitrary arrangement. Shepherd and flock, pastor and congregation, congregation and member, there is protection and care found in this arrangement. There is healing and help, strength and warmth, within this body of believers. I am blessed by God to be called your pastor, and I pray that we all may daily realize how blessed we all are to be dearly loved members of our Lord's precious flock with Jesus himself watching over us each and every day as our Good Shepherd. Amen.