

## The Office of the Good Shepherd

A Sermon Preached at Calvary Episcopal Church in Flemington, New Jersey  
By Father William Thiele on the 4th (Good Shepherd) Sunday of Easter, April 21st, 2024

Jesus said, "I am the Good Shepherd." +

And He said, "The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." Jesus proved that, not just by teaching, healing, doing miracles and nurturing, but by laying down his life on the cross for us.

He had the power to willingly lay it down. And he could take it up again, and did. We're celebrating Jesus' resurrection during this Easter season which continues fifty days to Pentecost, when the Church was jump-started by the Holy Spirit.

Last week we learned how Jesus, John and Paul called us "children of God." We are. We're responsible for our families here, and also for being part of the Lord's family.

Only John recorded Jesus actually calling himself the "Good Shepherd." But Matthew wrote that Jesus had compassion on the multitude, "because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd." (*Matt. 9:36*)

Matthew also related Jesus' explanation of the final judgment. "And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides *his* sheep from the goats." (*Matt 25:32*)

Mark recorded that Jesus said he would fulfill the prophecy of Zechariah 13:7. At the last supper before his crucifixion he said, "All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be

Year B, Easter 4:

The Holy Gospel John 10:11-18

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hireling and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hireling and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father."

Second Lesson 1 John 3:16-24

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But if any one has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth. By this we shall know that we are of the truth, and reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. All who keep his commandments abide in him, and he in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us.

First Lesson Acts 4:5-12

On the morrow their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a cripple, by what means this man has been healed, be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man is standing before you well. This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, but which has become the head of the corner. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

scattered.”

Peter also used the good shepherd imagery. In 1Pet. 2:25 he wrote, “For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.”

These references imply that Jesus as the Good Shepherd:

Is savior and defender.  
Is a compassionate leader.  
He knows us.  
And we know The Good Shepherd.  
He is boss and bishop.  
He is judge who advocates for us.  
And, He offends the world.

These all mesh with last week’s image of our being “children of God,” having a duty to live into that high calling. But on this “Good Shepherd Sunday” we think of sheep and shepherds to see how Jesus led, and how leadership here should work.

Jesus said, “The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” He said that it’s not that way with a hired hand. Confronted with danger, a rent-a-shepherd may abandon the sheep to their death. The Good Shepherd is fully committed to us and has proven himself. He is trustworthy. We should be trustworthy also.

When we come to Jesus, we’re in safe hands. Peter wrote, “For you were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.”

Jesus said, ‘I know my own and my own know me.’ We have to keep talking to the Lord, who hears our prayers. We need to pay attention to the Spirit’s leading.

We can’t have a relationship with someone if we won’t talk to them or pay attention to them. It’s that way in our role as sheep of the Good Shepherd.

The relationship isn’t easy. The world has its own attractions and voices. Sometimes the Lord has to discipline us. I don’t enjoy the Lord’s corrections, at least not until much later.

The Good Shepherd loves enough to leave the ninety and nine to retrieve the one who wouldn’t stay with the flock and became lost and at risk. Sometimes a sheep would be so rebellious that the shepherd would break one of its legs to keep it safe. The loving shepherd would then carry that sheep over his shoulders until it had healed enough to walk and had become smart enough to stay with the flock.

Before Jesus came, only the oracle Hebrew people could be part of God’s family. Converts had to become second class Hebrews. Jesus changed that. He said, “And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd.” And here we are.

John famously wrote, “Whoever believes on him will not perish.” Peter saw it. Paul founded the Gentile churches. God’s salvation is available to all who will claim the promise.

Whether we think of ourselves as “children of God” or as “sheep of the Good Shepherd,” we’re committed to be family of God. May we claim the blessings.

Jesus said, “I am the Good Shepherd.”  
AMEN +