

When we think of Jesus talking about being the Good Shepherd, it very often makes us maybe a little bit sentimental. We start to think about a shepherd who takes care of us, a shepherd who feeds us, a shepherd who holds us in his arms. And all of that is well and good. Those are good things to hold on to. But Jesus is talking about something a bit more in John chapter 10 for today. Because when he is talking about a shepherd calling for his sheep, he's using an image that would have been well known in his day. You see, because shepherds in those days during the night wanted to protect their sheep from predators as well as from thieves. And so they would put them into a stone enclosure, a kind of pen that would be guarded during the night. But the thing about it was that most shepherds were pretty poor. They couldn't afford one of these pens all by themselves. And so a group of them would come together and build this pen, and they would keep all of their flocks in the same pen during the night. So they'd be all mixed together. But then when it came time in the morning to take them out to pasture and to water, the shepherds would stand outside of this pen in different places. And the gatekeeper would open the gate, and then the shepherds would begin to call, to call for their sheep to come to them. And the sheep would actually sort themselves. They'd split off and go to their own respective shepherds, because they knew the voice of their shepherd. They knew who their master was. And Jesus is using this image today to teach us something as well, but also to give us a warning. Because the voice of our good shepherd is not the only voice that is calling for us. There is more than one shepherd standing and calling for us to follow after him. Will we listen to the voice of our good Shepherd when he calls to us on this day?

And the reason why this is so appropriate, Christians, is because Jesus is speaking in a situation that has a good example of these other shepherds. You see in John chapter nine, in the previous chapter, we meet a man who had been born blind. This man was then healed by Jesus. But the Pharisees, instead of rejoicing over this man, instead of being thankful that God had done such a great miracle for him, began to fight with one another. They began to argue with one another. Who did this Jesus think that he was? Who was he to come in and to do these things? And so the Pharisees began to question everybody, the people who were there, the people related to the people who were there, even the man who was born blind himself. But after that man confessed the truth to them, confessing the truth of what had happened and what God had done for him, the Pharisees abused him, calling him all kinds of names, and finally driving him out of the synagogue. The Pharisees weren't interested in caring for the sheep. They weren't interested in taking care of those that God had given to them. They abused the sheep. They used them however they wished, because the only people they really cared about was themselves. And dear Christians, the Pharisees in this reading for today give us an example of this other shepherd, this other shepherd who is also calling for us, the one who doesn't care about us, the one who only cares about himself. Jesus calls him a hired hand. But for the sake of simplicity, I will call him the bad shepherd. And so we have a choice before us today, Christians, the bad shepherd who calls to us and the good shepherd who calls to us. Which one will we follow?

And of course, we might think that's an easy question. Of course, we're going to follow the Good Shepherd! Of course, we're going to follow after Jesus. But before we answer it that way, consider this. The bad shepherd very often says things to us that sound good, and the Good Shepherd very often says things to us that sound bad, at least bad in a fleshly, worldly sense. And so the bad shepherd coming to us and promising us all these things is a very real temptation. Because the bad shepherd, Christians, comes to us, and he promises us that things will be easy. He promises us that we can have the things that our hearts desire. Are you sad? You can be happy. Are you poor? You can be rich. Are you grieving? You can be joyful. Are you struggling? You don't have to struggle anymore. And the bad Shepherd will promise us all of these things when we want them, because he's not really interested in what is good or what is right for us. He's really only interested in himself. Because even though he promises to us that he will lead us to green pastures, and only to green pastures, when the hard times

come, he will flee and leave us to be devoured by the wolf. Because that's how the world is, Christians. It promises you everything. It promises you an easy, wide, broad way. But it can't deliver, because all of these things lead down into death.

But our Good Shepherd, Christians, promises us things that, well, sound not so good, do they? The bad shepherd says that you can have whatever you want, but our Good Shepherd says deny yourself and follow after me. The bad shepherd says you can have everything, but the Good Shepherd says to take up your cross and to follow after me, to walk the way of suffering and of pain. The bad shepherd will promise you anything, anything that you want right now, and yet the Good Shepherd says whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. Take up your cross, deny yourself, and follow me. That doesn't sound so good to our earthly ears. That doesn't sound so good because it is the way of difficulty. It is the way of pain.

But Christians, our Good Shepherd says these things because he loves us. Because our Good Shepherd is also the one who has taken up these things upon himself. Our Good Shepherd is the one who has done what the bad shepherd never would and never could. The Good Shepherd has laid down his life for the sheep, laid down his life so that you might live. And even if our Good Shepherd leads us into the valley of the shadow of death, we don't have to be afraid of evil, because our Good Shepherd will never leave us and never forsake us. And he will lead us into green pastures. It might be hard until we get there, yes, but he will take us there, because he is truly the one who has given himself for us.

The bad shepherd is only interested in himself. He promises you everything, but can deliver on nothing, because his is the way that leads to death and hell and the jaws of the wolf. But your Good Shepherd comes to you this day, Christians. He comes to you, and he says to you that he will never leave you and that his is the way, as tough as it might be, to life everlasting. He is the one who has destroyed sin, death and hell, and he is the one who will lead us to green pastures which will never come to an end.

So Christians, on this day, when you hear the voice of these different shepherds calling to you, who will you listen to? The voice of the bad shepherd who's only interested in himself? Or the voice of the Good Shepherd who has come to you to give you everlasting life? Cling to him, dear Christians, and listen to His voice, as hard as it may be to hear, because his is the way that leads to eternal life.

To him be the glory, now and forever. Amen.