

**SERMON**  
**“THE SHEEP OF HIS PASTURE”**  
**JOHN 10:7-14**  
**SUNDAY, AUGUST 7, 2022**

A lamb worked its way out of a fenced pasture and headed toward a busy highway that passed through the farm country. Some people driving by spotted the lost lamb. They pulled over and tried to coax the lamb away from the road and back toward its pasture, but the frightened creature fled from its would-be saviors.

Compare that with the battered pickup truck that soon afterwards crawled down that same old busy highway. As soon as the driver stepped out of the truck and called to the lamb that little lamb ran right up to him and jumped into his arms.

What made the lamb run up to the truck driver? And why didn't the lamb heed the couple who tried to coax it to safety? The difference was that the lamb recognized the truck driver as his shepherd; whereas the couple were nothing more than strangers. Carol Geisler, writing for Creative Communications for the Parish, says that it was no different for the first-century Palestinian shepherd; *“All sheep wander,”* writes Geisler, *“but they know their shepherd and they follow the voice that they know.”*

Psalm 95:7 says that we are like sheep and that the Lord is our shepherd; *“we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand,”* says the psalm. Yet, like the lamb that had worked its way out of its fence and onto the busy highway; we too are tempted to wander from our shepherd's care! Geisler says of our wandering; *“We will squeeze our way—with a variety of excuses—between or beneath the boundary fence of his Word and his will and take off on our own.”* Sometimes we just make small forays into freedom —

- the juicy bit of gossip that is overheard and enjoyed and passed on to someone else,
- the dislike, even hatred, for a co-worker,
- the disregard, however temporary, for a spouse or sibling or parent.

Geisler further says of these forays; *“We know the commands of God that surround our lives for our safety, but we can, and often do, choose to work our way around his commandments, often with little thought to the effort.”* But there are other escapes into what we imagine as freedom that range more widely and take us even further away from the safety of the pasture. She says of these escapes; *“they carry with them deadly consequences that bring harm to others and to our own bodies.”* In Matthew 15:19 Jesus tells us that these have their origin within our hearts; *“evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.”* Regardless of our escapes, however; whether they be small forays or full excursions into sin; our Shepherd Jesus Christ loves us still.

A pastor was teaching a Sunday school class to a bunch of elementary-age children about the 23rd Psalm. He told the children about sheep, that they weren't very smart and needed lots of guidance, and that a shepherd's job was to stay close to the sheep, protect them from wild animals and keep them from wandering off and doing dumb things that would get them hurt or killed.

He pointed to the little children in the room and said that they were the sheep and needed lots of guidance. Then the pastor put his hands out to the side, palms up in a dramatic gesture, and with raised eyebrows said to the children, “If you are the sheep then who is the shepherd?”

There was an awkward silence.

Then Jennie, a young second-grader, said, “Jesus: Jesus is the shepherd.”

The pastor obviously caught by surprise, said to her, “Well, then, who am I?”

Jennie thought for a moment, and then said with a shrug, “I guess you must be the sheep dog.”

The difference between the shepherd and the sheep dog is that whereas the shepherd will be by our side throughout all eternity; the sheep dog will only be with us as long as we stay in the sheep pen.

Geisler says of the Good Shepherd: *“he came down to earth to seek out his wandering, dirty, bedraggled sheep and bring them back to himself.”* The promise of a shepherd, powerful yet tender and compassionate, was uttered by Isaiah over 2,700 years ago. His prophecy not only foretold of the shepherd’s coming; but assured us that he would be willing to leave the confines of the sheep pen and seek out the lost! He would even leave behind the 99, as Matthew 18:12 says, to seek out the one who was lost.

There is a simple, yet beautiful prayer that I recently found written specifically for dog owners. It goes something like this: *“Dear Lord, please make me into the person my dog thinks I am.”*

This dog-owners’ prayer has a lot of aspirational truth in it. Dogs tend to be overjoyed at the sight of their masters after returning from a long day at work. Who wouldn’t want to be the kind of person that everyone enthusiastically greets and can’t wait to see?

Like dogs, sheep also recognize their master’s voice. Jesus himself understood this simple truth about each and every one of his sheep. *“My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me,”* says Jesus.

In a recent article about shepherding Homiletics Magazine shared what it called “The Shepherd’s First Rule of Shepherding.” *“It’s not about you,”* said the article; *“It’s about the sheep.”* Jesus demonstrates this like no other. When the sheep see Jesus, they see a shepherd who has their best interests at heart, and they know it because he is willing to die for them.

Homiletics reminds us that as disciples of Jesus Christ, we not only have responded to his call, but have taken on a task of shepherding as well. We sheep, says Homiletics, are also under-shepherds who care for others and want to bring them into Jesus’ fold where they can experience abundant, eternal life. In order to do that, we have to be willing to care for the sheep like Jesus does, to know what they need and to lead them well. Every one of us has a small flock we are given to tend, be it a family, a group of coworkers, a group of friends or even a small group at church.

Maybe a question we should ask ourselves is: what do our “sheep” see when they look at us?

As disciples of Christ, we are called not only to adhere to the shepherd’s voice; but to lead others in following him. We do that best by reflecting his care — ensuring that people are well-fed spiritually and physically; that we create an environment of peace where people feel valued, loved and cared for; and that we care about the flock more than we care about ourselves. Perhaps we could take a lesson from the Dog Owner’s Prayer. But instead of praying that I become the person my dog thinks I am, maybe we should be praying that we become the sheep that Jesus says we are: the sheep of his pasture.

Let us pray: *“Lord, help me to be the kind of sheep that leads others to the You. Amen.”*