

*The “I Am Sayings of Jesus
Lenten - 2018*

Pastor Randy Orndorff

“I Am the Good Shepherd”

March 11, 2018

Key Texts: John 10:1-10

I. Introduction – The “I Am Poster”

When I was in college there was this poster with all the names of God on it. It listed Old Testament and New Testament names and was in the colors of the rainbow. The name of God in white letters in the middle? “I Am”. How many of you had or have that poster? It hung on my wall in college and that was a time I really hungered and thirsted for the things of God. To know God better.

Those “I Am” sayings of Jesus help us know God better, to know Jesus better and know ourselves better. God is a God who wants to be known by us. Jesus said in John 12:3 that, “This is eternal life, that they (we) may know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent”.

And II Chronicles 16:9, “For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him.” Today we pray: God thanks for your wanting to know us and that you desire to be intimately known by us.

Do you hunger for God? Do you desire to live in the light of Jesus and shine your light for Him?

Our God is the great “I am”. Jesus said, “I am the Bread of Life”. “I am the Light of the World.” And today’s lesson focuses on Jesus as “the Good Shepherd” and “the Gate”.

II. Babe the Pig

Everyone within the hearing range of Jesus would know something about sheep. Today we as a society may not be as familiar with the behaviors of sheep. We just know how cute baby lambs are. Of course, many of us have seen Babe the pig who had the herding skills of a sheep dog and “Maa” the matriarch of the sheep. Most of us recall the day the “wolves”—wild dogs attack the sheep herd and Babe comes to the rescue and fends the wolves off, but Maa is mortally wounded and dies as a result. Of course, Rex, who is hard of hearing, thinks Babe killed Maa, but in a conversation Fly, the mother dog, stops barking at the sheep and actually has a conversation with them and learns the truth, that feral dogs have been killing sheep on neighboring farms. Babe is so good with the sheep on the farm that Farmer Hoggett signs Babe up for a sheep herding competition. These sheep do not know Babe and think it odd for a pig to be herding them. They don’t listen to his voice. Rex, who for most of the movie treats Babe horribly sees what is happening as the sheep pay no attention to Babe. Rex, seemingly transformed, runs back to the farm to ask the sheep what to do and they give him a secret password, making him promise to treat them better from now on. He returns just in the nick of time to convey the password to Babe. As he speaks the sheep obey his voice, enter the pen and Babe receives the highest score.

Old farmer Hoggett praises Babe saying, “That’ll do Pig. That’ll do.”

III. The Voice of the Good Shepherd

Would you recognize the voice of The Good Shepherd if he were speaking to you? Or would you, like sheep are prone to do, ignore His voice if God did speak to you?

You see, I think God desires us to trust Him, obey Him and to be saved by His son, Jesus. As the story in John 10 unfolds, Jesus says in vs 14, “I am the good Shepherd. I know my sheep; my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.”

Friends, God cares about you so much. Even though we as sheep may have some bad habits and poor qualities.

Sheep like to graze a lot. They love the feeling of security. They want to feel safe. The sheep come in and go out. There is a rhythm to their lives. And yet sheep are prone to wander and to leave the Shepherd they

love. We all love the constant flow between the familiar and predictable and all the while we seek newness, excitement, and a change from time to time, from our routines. Too much change makes us a little antsy and anxious and nervous. We are like sheep.

IV. The Truth about Sheep

In her study called “Finding the I Am”, Lysa Terkeurst points out some characteristics of sheep. She says:

- sheep are defenseless animals
- sheep are prone to go astray
- sheep have poor eyesight
- sheep tend to follow other sheep without thinking
- sheep are stubborn

Did you know that a sheep can get stuck on its back and die because they are unable to get back on their feet? Sheep are often described as “utterly helpless”.

Jesus, the Good Shepherd and the Gateway for the sheep coming and going from the sheep pen, looks at us as sheep. You may or may not like that analogy, but as I journey through life, there is a lot of truth to this.

Jesus loves the sheep. Jesus tells this story in Matthew 18:12-14. “What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep and one of them wanders off, will he not leave the 99 on the hills and go look for the one that wanders off?”

Even when the sheep decides to do things its own way, even when the sheep chooses to give in to the temptation of sin, the Good Shepherd still cares and comes looking. Not all the sheep are going to wander off and need to be found. Why? Because sheep like the familiar. If you think that’s not true let me ask, “Do you sit in or near the same place in church every Sunday, or for Wednesday night supper, or the Flame Café?” My guess is 90% of you do and it disturbs you a little if someone is sitting in what you think to be your seat, but really isn’t your seat because in God’s house there is no assigned seating. If you or I, (and trust me it happens to me, too), find someone is in your seat, they are a sheep too, who deserve respect. Just take a moment to breathe and go find another place to sit that day.

V. Moving Sheep can be Hard Work

My mom tells the story of Pastor Wigfield in Winchester who asked his “sheep” to all stand up one Sunday, criss-cross in the aisles, and sit in a different pew. You’d think all hell broke loose in the church. We are such creatures of habit! I saw a lady leave church one day because a person was sitting in her seat.

Friends, what if that person were here for the first time to see if there really is anything to this God who is all powerful and loving and someone asks them to move because “you are in my seat”? How much is that like Jesus? What if they had wandered from the fold and Jesus as the Good Shepherd found them however that may look and they returned to the fold and another sheep says “that’s my seat”. Devastating feeling. At CUMC we have room for all God’s sheep and we make room for each other. Trust me, this has happened. So many people talk about how friendly and welcoming we are and you know 90% of the time we are. It’s the 10% of the time we are not that concerns me. Can we agree, as the sheep in this fold, to welcome people with 100% excellence? We need our greeters at all services, our ushers, our hospitality team to welcome all God’s sheep. We need each of you to do the same.

I’d like us to be known as the most welcoming, friendly, caring, compassionate church in town. Not a “better than” church but a flock that values all people of every color, economic status, and age level as God’s sheep. Let it never be said again that I was asked to move because it was “my” seat. The one God has called to Shepherd this flock at this moment in time asks you to be good sheep to each other. Too often sheep bite and God expects better.

And do you know how the Shepherd feels about that one lost sheep that is found? They are happier about the one than the 99 that did not wander off because “your Father in Heaven is not willing that any of these little ones be lost.” (Mt 18:14)

Do you think that means the Good Shepherd loves that one sheep that was lost more than the 99 who did not wander? No Way! God loves the ones that do not wander as much as those who do. It's just that God does not want anyone to perish, but all to have life.

VI. Jesus said, "I Am the Gate"

Another thing to know about is Jesus saying, "I am the gate" and sticking with this sheep-tending analogy. Sheep pens in Jesus' day came in several forms. Nicer ones had tall walls and a completely enclosed gate and could be run or managed by a shepherd, but most often were rented. A shepherd would pay to keep his sheep there.

A lower cost pen would often not have a gate where the sheep come and go and to help the sheep feel safe and secure and to rest at night, the shepherd would lay across the entrance, or the gateway and use his body as a gate. That's how people would have understood Jesus when he said, "I am the gate for the sheep". (vs 9)

As the gatekeeper the shepherd would check the sheep in their coming in and going out. Author W. Phillip Kellar said sheep need four things in order to lie down. They must be:

- Free of fear
- Free from friction with others in the flock
- Free from parasites and pests, and
- Free from hunger

VII. Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep

Can you relate to sheep?

Have you ever had a hard time lying down to rest? Lord knows I have. Just Tuesday night as I thought about BK and her situation and talking to the children's choirs on Tuesday this coming week and the Bell and Adult choirs this past week. Wrestling with the thought, "Why God, when it seems we get headed in a good direction and get some momentum, do we have all these diversions and situations arise?" One questions their leadership, are we doing God's will, where did we go wrong?

Do you know what one of the biggest threats is we all face? An enemy who wants to steal and rob from us. Wow, that's where this shepherd and sheep parable starts! "The man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate but climbs in some other way, is a thief and a robber." You see people did not break in to kill the sheep. Wolves or wild dogs might do that. But thieves came to steal the sheep, not hurt them, because they would take the sheep, sell them and make money.

The Good Shepherd would be the Gateway and thieves were not nearly as likely to climb in and steal the sheep. The sheep, knowing this, felt safe and secure and could lie down and rest.

VIII. A Good Shepherd versus a Hired Hand

Some sheep tenders were considered hirelings. It says in vs 12 "the hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep." So, when he sees the wolf—we could say the enemy, the deceiver, or the devil coming - he abandons the sheep and runs away. The man runs because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

I've been asked why I have stayed so long in 2 appointments as a Methodist pastor. And please know I would never look down on pastors who stay shorter times. We are all different as pastors. Growing up on a farm, I just wanted to be a Good Shepherd and care for, tend, and help the sheep grow and move on to better and greener pastures. I do not want to feel like a hired hand.

And still in my humanness I realize I cannot protect everyone. After all, I couldn't "protect" my own daughter. I still cringe when I think of her accident. And I have been through the valley with many others. If the Lord were not my Shepherd, I would have been done a long time ago.

I owe, and maybe you do too, everything I am to God and the good shepherds God placed in my life along the way. Surely thieves have tried to cross the wall to steal my life of living for Jesus, the Good Shepherd, away. I can tell you when I hear Him call today, I am way quicker to follow and to listen to His voice.

IX. The Good Shepherd Lays Down His Life Because He Loves the Sheep

It's not just a saying that "the Good Shepherd will lay down his life for the sheep". The Good Shepherd has laid down his life for the sheep, all the sheep of his pasture, and no one can pluck you from his hand. And in the end Jesus says, "there will be one flock and one shepherd" v 16. That shepherd is a person and his name is Jesus. He is the one who laid down his life for us.

So, when times of challenge, questioning, uncertainty, and worry come along and you have a hard time "resting"--

Focus on the Good Shepherd. Focus on Jesus.

Focus on Jesus, make Jesus known to other sheep who have wandered. Focus on Jesus, make room in the fold for all.

And if the thief who is also a deceiver has tried to isolate you, or confuse you, to make you think the grass looks better over there, be careful to listen, for the voice of the Good Shepherd will call your name. He'll remind you, you can't do life alone. He will call you as He did me, to trust Him and follow Him and He will be the Good Shepherd who will lead you on in the journey. The sheep know the Good Shepherd's voice. They respond and follow.

Are you hungry? Do you want the light of Jesus to shine in and through your life? Will you allow Jesus to be your Good Shepherd and Gateway?

The Good Shepherd always has your and my best interest in mind. Verse 10 says it best. "The thief comes to kill, steal and destroy. I have come that you may have life, and have life to the full."

Have you ever thought when you enter through the Gate you enter into a life with Jesus? You enter into the very Presence of God? There's no secret password here. It's our being willing to follow the Good Shepherd. Jesus says, "(fill in your name), I love you."

X. Closing Prayer

Let Us Pray:

Loving Shepherd, You know that we tend to wander and get ourselves in tight places. Help us to respond to Your voice as You call us, over and over, toward the way that leads to life. Help us this week to listen closely and to obey the Holy Spirit's small nudgings. We give thanks for your tender care that has kept us close and carried us this far. In the name of Jesus, who faithfully and diligently seeks all wanderers.

Amen