

Jesus is Your Good Shepherd  
I. He Laid Down His Life for You  
II. He will Never Abandon You

*(John 10:11-18) "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."*

I expect that we've all experienced it to one degree or another—that feeling of loneliness. That feeling that we're isolated from people, we have no real connection to anyone, we're all alone—even if we're in the middle of a crowd. For some of you, that feeling really hit when you lost your loved one to the sleep of death. Suddenly that empty chair or that empty bed has you feeling like you have an empty heart. For others, that feeling of loneliness hits when the family gathering ends and everyone goes back to their own family. You go from the euphoria of laughter and activity to the reality of solitude and silence. For still others, that feeling hits when your classmates treat you like you don't belong, you don't fit in. For others, it hits when you realize that your spouse just doesn't "get" you. It's like he can't relate to what you're feeling. Or she just doesn't understand what you're dealing with. It's like, even though you're married, you still feel like you're all alone. And of course, if you're not married, maybe that feeling is even more intense.

Chances are, we've all experienced times when we felt disconnected, alone, felt like there was no one there for us. But you know, we're not the only ones who have experienced emotions like these. 2000 years ago, Jesus' disciples undoubtedly went through some of the same emotions. After spending three years with Jesus, the disciples had undoubtedly grown comfortable with having Jesus around. They had developed a very special relationship to this man. And then suddenly, Jesus was taken away from them, first by his death on Good Friday, but ultimately by his ascension into heaven. Just like that, the man who gave their lives meaning and purpose, suddenly was no longer with them—at least not visibly. It's not hard to imagine that these disciples would have felt very much alone.

But you see, long before that day came when Jesus and his disciples would be separated, Jesus was already preparing them for the feelings they would face. The feelings that we still face to this day. Jesus reminded them that even though they might feel alone, still, because of his resurrection, the fact is, they would never be alone. The same thing is still true for you and me today. In fact, that's one of the ways that Jesus' resurrection still has an impact on our lives today. *Jesus is risen, so we're never alone.*

Here in our text, Jesus drives home that point by means of a picture, the illustration of a shepherd and his sheep. Our sermon theme today is simply this, Christian,

Jesus is your Good Shepherd.

What does that mean? It means:

I. He laid down his life for you.

II. He will never abandon you.

Our text begins with one of Jesus many “I am” statements. Jesus says, *“I am the Good Shepherd.”* And immediately, Jesus explains what a Good Shepherd does. Jesus says, *“The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”* Now, those words, of course, find their fulfillment in Jesus offering up his life on the cross of Calvary. But here in our text, Jesus shares some additional information about his death, which we maybe haven't always fully appreciated. Notice, Jesus says, *“The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life.”* Those words underscore the fact that Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross was in complete agreement with the will of his Father. Or to put it another way, the Father loved his Son so much because the Son loved his sheep so much.

But notice what else Jesus says. *“The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. 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.”* With those words, Jesus is making the point that his death was a voluntary action on his part. In other words, Jesus died because he chose to die. It wasn't that the circumstances surrounding Jesus’ life all went wrong at the same time. It wasn't that Jesus’ enemies finally got the best of him. It wasn't even that the loss of blood from all the scourging or his failure to catch his breath on the cross finally caught up to Jesus. No, as Jesus says, in reference to his own life, *“no one takes it from me.”* Rather, Jesus willingly, and yes, deliberately, gave up his life. You realize, that is not something that you or I have the ability, or the God-given authority, to do—to literally give up his life. To decide, “Now is the moment when I will separate my soul from my body.” But that’s what Jesus did. Remember how St. John records that moment on the cross? *Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.* As the ultimate act of love, and in complete fulfillment of his father's will, Jesus literally laid down his life.

But notice, Jesus says that he not only had the authority to lay down his life. He also had the authority to take it up again. That too, is something that you and I do not have the ability nor the authority to do. I can’t raise myself from the grave. But Jesus can and did. Jesus used his power and authority to not only lay down his life, but also to take it up again.

And to think that he used that authority not for his own benefit. He used that authority strictly for your benefit, and mine. And remember, Jesus laid down his life not merely for us, as in, “for our good.” The Greek word there says that Jesus laid down his life in place of us. Jesus went to the cross so that we don't have to. Or to put it another way, because Jesus endured absolute separation from God, on the cross, you can be sure that you'll never be separated from God, in this life or in the next.

And really, that brings us to the second thing you can know about Jesus, your Good Shepherd. Not only did I. He lay down his life for you. You can also be sure that II. He will never abandon you. Here in our text, Jesus draws a comparison between the Good Shepherd and the hired hand. In fact, by pointing out some of the characteristics of the hired hand, we get, by contrast, a much better picture of what a good shepherd is really like. Notice how Jesus describes the hired hand. *“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. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.* What are the three main characteristics of a hired hand? 1. He does not own the sheep. 2. When the wolf comes, he abandons the sheep. And why does he abandon the sheep? 3. Because he does not care for the sheep.

Now, contrast that with Jesus as your Good Shepherd. First, unlike the hired hand, Jesus does own his sheep—not in a negative sense, like you're in his custody and now he controls you like a head of livestock. No rather, he owns you, as in, you are his prized possessions. Jesus paid the highest price possible to make you his own. He spilled his holy blood to make you a member of his eternal flock. That means that Jesus has a vested interest in you. He's invested a piece of himself in you. That means he cares about what happens to you. You are special to him because you belong to him.

Isn't that the way it works in real life? Why do I take the time to wash the car sitting in my driveway rather than the one sitting in my neighbor's driveway? Because one of those two cars I own. It belongs to me. And so I'm going to take care of it, because it belongs to me. Just like the shepherd who takes care of his sheep because they belong to him.

The second characteristic of the Good Shepherd, in contrast with the hired hand? When the wolf attacks, the hired hand runs away. But the Good Shepherd does not run away. 2. Jesus does not abandon his sheep. Rather, the Good Shepherd stands his ground. He sticks with us. In fact, he fights for us. This is a key characteristic of our Good Shepherd. When the wolf attacks, his goal is to scatter the flock, to separate the sheep from the shepherd, to isolate them, where they, in turn, become easy pickings for the Evil One.

But you see, in reality, Satan doesn't have to physically separate us from our Shepherd. He just has to get us to think that we're separated from the Shepherd. Get us to think that Jesus is not at our side any longer. Get us to think that Jesus doesn't really care about us. And there are a lot of ways for Satan to achieve that objective. Sometimes he does it by tempting us into sin. He leads us to do or say something that is downright shameful. And then he whispers in our ear, “You think God is going to claim you as one of his own? You think God is still on your side after what you did? No way!”

Or maybe Satan attacks us by bringing hard times into our lives. We lose our job, our health goes downhill, a loved one dies, a relationship goes sour, and Satan whispers in our ear, “Where is your God now? If God really loves you, if God is on your side, why is all this bad stuff happening to you? Looks like your God has abandoned you.”

But you realize, all the things that Satan is whispering—those are all lies. They are all spoken to make you feel like your even further separated you from God. To make you feel vulnerable and hopeless and alone. But here's the thing. Your Savior is not a hired hand. When the wolf attacks, Jesus doesn't abandon the sheep. He never says, “You're on your own. You got yourself into this mess; you'll have to get yourself out. You're going to get what you have coming to you.” No, what does Scripture say? *There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother (Prov. 18:24)*. Jesus makes you the promise, “*Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you (Hebrews 13:5)*”. What Jesus once said to his disciples, he says to you, “*Surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age (Matthew 28:20)*”. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. Therefore he will never abandon his sheep.

And why won't Jesus abandon his sheep? Why won't he abandon you? The answer? Because 3. Jesus cares for his sheep. Really, that's the third contrast that Jesus draws between the hired hand and the Good Shepherd. Jesus says that the hired hand *runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep*. The hired hand doesn't care. He doesn't love the

sheep. The Good Shepherd, on the other hand, does love his Sheep. He loves them enough to die for them. And why does the Good Shepherd love his sheep? Because he knows his sheep. What does Jesus say? *"I know my sheep and my sheep know me."* Jesus knows his sheep. He knows how flawed we are. He knows how weak we are, how easily frightened we are, how easily we are led astray. He knows how many times we do the same stupid things again and again and again.

And so, what does Jesus do? He continues to love us, to shepherd us, to carry us when we are too weak to go on. Yes, sometimes, he disciplines us. But never, ever, does he leave us.

In fact, isn't that just one of the ways that the Risen Lord impacts your life? Think about it. If Jesus Christ is still dead in the grave, then we really are all on our own. It's us against the world. But Jesus is not dead in the grave. Jesus lives! And that means that you are not alone. The Risen Lord is at your side, no matter what. And even more important, the Risen Lord is on your side. Believe it. And live in the peace and security that fact gives. In Jesus' name. Amen.