

John 10:11-18

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Keep Walking Together With Jesus

✠ **The Good Shepherd laid down His life for us. (vv. 11-15)**

✠ **The Good Shepherd gathers one flock. (vv. 16-18)**

In the name of Jesus, our Good Shepherd, dear sheep of His flock:

It seems like only yesterday that I was talking with a classmate's mother in the Portland International Airport on my way back to the former Northwestern Lutheran Academy in Mobridge, South Dakota. She had asked how things were going. What I told her I don't remember. Her reaction I do. She smiled sadly and asked, "Did you read the article by President Toppe in the *Northwestern Lutheran*?" (now called *Forward in Christ*) "Which article?" I puzzled. "The one about students going home and bad mouthing our synod schools." Ouch! I did not realize how negative I sounded.

Have you ever thought you were doing something "good," but not? How often don't we prove how little we understand the meaning of "good"? A "good" movie in America today may be filled with raunchy sex and despicable violence. A "good" meal to a collegiate may be chips and Coke. And good management of our God-given resources may only be "good" for us, not the Gospel. Praise God that we have a truly **Good Shepherd**. Today we consider the blessing of our WELS ministerial training schools in the light of our **Good Shepherd**. *Keep Walking Together With Jesus*. See first of all how...

✠ **The Good Shepherd laid down His life for us. (vv. 11-15)**

Looking back on my teen years, I am impressed at how patient parents and teachers were with me. They reflected the care of our **Good Shepherd** when He **laid down His life for us**. If you are feeling unloved and useless today, look away from yourself and focus on Jesus. Look back to the previous chapter in John's Gospel at the truly spectacular goodness of our **Good Shepherd**. We all understand the frustration of false accusations, blurting out, "I didn't do it!" But what if you're doing something good?

Jesus had just healed a man born blind, then explained to His disciples that "*neither the man nor his parents sinned..., but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.*" (John 9:3). Who could possibly object to Jesus healing a blind man? Pharisees, the most intense "church people" of their day, were absolutely convinced that they knew God's law better than Jesus and that they could keep it better. Jesus dared to give the man sight on the Sabbath Day. They called that "work"! Everyone knew Moses commanded the people to rest on the Sabbath (Hebrew "rest"). What they forgot was that Jesus is the promised Rest to which all those Sabbath days had pointed. And you can see it in the way He launches into the beautiful Good Shepherd Chapter, John 10, in order to answer His enemies!

Do you feel God is angry at you because of your sins? Have you been impatient, unkind and selfish this week? Have you been disobedient to your parents? Disrespectful to your boss? Dishonoring to your girlfriend or your spouse? Have you wasted time and money on foolishness and spent precious hours on useless or sinful entertainment instead of living a responsible life of love? Then look at Jesus reaching out to His enemies. Instead of blasting them in anger, He seeks again to win their souls for God. He wants to win your heart and soul with these words too: "*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 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.*"

Jesus is "**good**" to the core. He will die rather than let the wolf from hell destroy His flock. Are you one of His sheep? If you were baptized in the Name of the Triune God, then you belong to the **Good Shepherd** – His to care for, His to protect no matter what. And He wants to do this through well trained

and disciplined pastors, i.e. shepherds, who serve not like hirelings on the run, but with the courage of the Good Shepherd Himself. *“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me....”* That means more than “knowing” that an airplane flies high in the sky. This is the *in close and personal knowledge* of the **Good Shepherd** for His sheep. He knows each of us by name and examines us personally each day. We pass under His rod, one by one in single file, as He uses His Word to part the wool and look for scabs and sores that need His personal attention. Whenever He finds the infection of sin, He cleanses it with His disinfecting Law and soothes it with the healing balm of His Gospel. Firm, but, oh, so gentle and loving, are the hands of Him who knows us so well. *“Just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.”* Since Jesus speaks so kindly to His enemies, how much more kindhearted is He toward us in spite of the sins of our youth and old age? He truly knows. He truly cares. He is truly *“good”* in the most beautiful sense.

✠ **The Good Shepherd gathers one flock. (vv. 16-18)**

When I was in high school, we were new to the Wisconsin Synod. And it bothered me at first when professors criticized the doctrine and practices of other denominations. Like many of us here, I asked, “Does the Wisconsin Synod think they alone are right? That only they will go to heaven?”

Time and again my professors and now my fellow pastors echo our **Good Shepherd** here. He **gathers one flock**. Everyone who believes in Jesus as His Savior is a member of Christ’s flock. I’ve come to realize that the Wisconsin Synod is more clear on this point than most denominations which do misjudge others or claim, “It doesn’t matter where you go to church as long as you go.” That’s like saying, “It doesn’t matter where sheep get their water as long as they drink.” The **Good Shepherd** only wants His sheep to drink the purest water of life, treasured up in God’s Holy Word, the Bible. We wouldn’t drink from a glass with a few drops of pollution would we? I know God’s Word is always right. I belong to the WELS because they agree God is always right and discipline pastors who teach falsely.

Our **Good Shepherd** explains this way: *“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. 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. This command I received from my Father.”* Jesus knows the identity of His sheep. They *“listen”* to His voice. They recognize one “holy Christian Church” in the Apostles’ Creed. We refuse to call this Creed a collection of myths the way most seminaries and denominations do today. We truly believe Jesus was born of the virgin Mary, lived and died and lives again by His powerful resurrection from the dead. He proves how truly *“good”* He is because all our sin and death could not keep Him in the grave. He obeyed every command of His Father to make us able to call Him our dear Father in heaven.

Our unique WELS worker training system – two prep schools, and one ministerial college right here in New Ulm, Minnesota, along with our Seminary in Mequon, Wisconsin – have a single, solid purpose. We train pastors, teachers and staff ministers to serve us and future generations with the unadulterated Word of God. We want law and gospel, sin and grace. In short, we want our **Good Shepherd** and His love to be the focus of all we believe, teach and confess. My personal benefit from the WELS schools is more than one sermon can contain. But every time you find yourself convicted with me because of God’s holy Law exposing our sin, then healed with me by the Gospel of God’s full and free forgiveness in Christ, we benefit together from WELS worker training. That alone is reason enough to pour our resources into the full and generous support our schools need. Because as long as these schools echo the voice of the **Good Shepherd**, they are *“good”* as He is. He gives His soul-saving goodness to His sheep by faith. May His pure Word ever **Keep us Walking Together With Jesus**. And may our **Good Shepherd** bless our efforts to increase support especially for our college of ministry, Martin Luther College in New Ulm, Minnesota. Grant your grace and favor, O good and gracious God! Amen.