

Follow the Good Shepherd

- † **Powerful works** (vv.22-26)
- † **Winning words** (vv.27-30)

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

Years ago before there was a New Life Evangelical Lutheran Church in Shoreview, Minnesota, a man contacted me, excited about my open letter to the community. From 1300 home visits and over 400 follow-up interviews on the non-churched, I compiled comments that matched the Holy Scriptures into what kind of church we hoped to establish. The man’s family worshiped with another in their own house church. Shortly into my visit it was clear they were not as independent as they thought. Their spiritual leader was one of many TV preachers who say things like, “God spoke to me,” then give listeners his opinion as if that were the Word of God. The two families did not want to listen to what is written in the Holy Scriptures of the Bible. They believed in continuing revelation, ignoring: *“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.”* (Hebrews 1:1f NIV84) Soon one famous TV preacher was in prison for embezzling from his hearers. Our best intentions can backfire. The only safe course: **Follow the Good Shepherd.** He does...

† **Powerful works** (vv.22-26)

Reading from John 10 should excite you more than your best movie of all time. This Good Shepherd Chapter is so encouraging with famous Bible verses and the audience. You might think Jesus is speaking to His disciples; they hear, but they’re not the target audience. Maybe the crowds following Jesus? Not them either. John 10 was first spoken to Jesus’ enemies, Jewish religious leaders known as Pharisees. They were so sure of their own righteousness, they felt no need for a Savior and totally rejected Jesus as God’s Son from heaven. Such deep, irrational hatred! Later when Jesus did one of his **Powerful works** by raising His friend Lazarus from the dead, *“the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him.”* (John 12:10f NIV84) That’s their solution to the Jesus problem: Kill Lazarus again!

You might expect Jesus to blast His enemies severely. But that would be myth and legend. God the Holy Spirit wrote the facts in the same way He powered up Jesus as the Lord’s Christ in His Baptism. Listen! Jesus spoke some of His kindest words to His worst enemies. Hold on to that when your heart is fluttering in fear and loaded with guilt. Since Jesus was so kind to His enemies, you can anticipate His welcome for you and me, even when we’re the worst of sinners. **Powerful works** of kindness.

In the cold of winter Jesus is walking in the covered colonnade built by King Solomon. It survived the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem and the Lord’s Temple in 586 B.C. Three football fields long, there was plenty of room for crowds and enemies. They “surrounded” Jesus, demanding: *“How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.”* Not listening for three years? The perfect, most powerful preacher, God’s own Son? Our sinful hearts have a hearing problem.

Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I am doing in my Father's name testify about me. ²⁶But you do not believe, because you are not my sheep, as I said to you. ¹ This is loaded with amazing detail. Jesus literally *judged back* in His answer, since He is God's Son who will judge the living and the dead on the Last Day. As the Word of God in human flesh, Jesus kept telling them the same things over and over again, "*but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united in faith with those who did listen.*" (Hebrews 4:2) There is no excuse for unbelief. Jesus healed the sick, raised the dead, gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf. Jesus did more miraculous **Power works** than anyone else. Earlier the Jews tried to arrest Jesus. *Many in the crowd believed in him and asked, "When the Christ comes, he won't do more miraculous signs than this man, will he?"* (John 7:31) So much evidence! So little faith! One simple reason: "*You are not my sheep.*"

† **Winning words (vv.27-30)**

Be honest now. Do we really want to be known as "*sheep*"? No other animal needs more care, gets more lost, finds more ways to get messed up. They'll drink from manure polluted mud puddles while their shepherd is trying to lead them to high country meadows and clear flowing streams. They can't understand that parasites in the water will kill them from the inside out. All that wool shivers when wet and loads up with filth. Walking the same paths into a deep rut, rolling comfortably, heavy wool like sin get them "cast down" on their back, belly to the sun – freezing in winter, baking in summer. They're dead unless the Good Shepherd comes looking for them. Pathetic creatures – we *sheep*!

The world keeps proving Jesus right. People are *sheep*, always following someone whether they realize it or not. Claiming independence, they fall victim to deadly theories and outright lies of scientists, politicians, tyrants and preachers. Even the most "liberated" are blind to the future and ignore the past. *Sheep* we are, but who is your shepherd? **Follow the Good Shepherd** speaking healthy **Winning words**.

Recall the story of shepherd Philip Keller about the hired hand caring for his neighbor's sheep. They crawled out of their blasted barren brown pasture into Keller's lush green side of the fence. Too much too soon, their bellies bloated. The hired shepherd slit their throats, loaded them in a wheelbarrow, couldn't care less – just like the cruel imposter shepherd from hell who wants everyone miserable forever.

But Jesus the Good Shepherd lets us hear His **Winning words** to capture the heart of His enemies: "*My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all. No one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. ³⁰I and the Father are one.*"

In Africa where Philip Keller grew up, they herd their sheep like Holy Land shepherds. They're not like western shepherds driving their sheep with dogs. The Good Shepherd can enter a sheep pen with mixed flocks and just start talking. His own sheep recognize His voice and follow Him out, everywhere, confident of His tender, loving care. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for you, His sheep. Then in full Easter victory over death, Jesus took up His life again to live for you forever.

Jesus and the Father are "*one*" with the Holy Spirit. "*The Lord our God is one.*" (Mark 12:29) So you don't get just a fraction of God's love when you follow Jesus. His *sheep* get all God's love, 100%, undivided attention from God who has loved you by name from all eternity. You may wander off, fall into sin, get cast down with depression and grief, but the Good Shepherd is hot on your tail. He's like Philip Keller with his flask of brandy. He finds His little lamb, picks it up and warms it with a few drops and gets his legs circulating again. In Word and Sacrament He just holds you. You wag your little tail in glee and follow the Good Shepherd more closely again. Those nail-pierced hands will never let you go. He holds you close to the Father's heart by His shed blood of all-forgiving grace. **Follow the Good Shepherd** all the way to our heavenly home. Amen.

¹ Non-designated passages: EHV ~ *Evangelical Heritage Version* (<http://wartburgproject.org>) © 2017. NPH: 800-662-6022. For *The Preacher's Apprentice (TPA)* sermon study or copies: m.cordes@comast.net. New Life Evangelical Lutheran Church You can also call: 651-484-1169. Hear the sermon at www.wels.us/newlife. 180 County Rd F - Shoreview, MN 55126