

“The Good Shepherd”
 (or, “ Do You Think of Anyone
 Whom You Can Trust?”)
 John 10:11-18
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John 10:11-18 (NRSV):

(Note: Jesus is speaking in John's remembrance of the healing of the man born blind.)

- 11 “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.
 12 The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away---and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.
 13 The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep.
 14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own 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 do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.
 17 For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again.
 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord; I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.

Some of you may be familiar with a language term which is known as a **“Spoonerism.”**

A radio news commentator once used a **“Spoonerism”** when talking about an American General whose name was **General Lyman Lemnitzer**. Instead of calling him General Lyman Lemnitzer, the news commentator referred to him as General “Lemon Lymnitzer.”

A **“Spoonerism”** is a language term that is named for a British clergyman, William Archibald Spooner (1844-1930). My guess is that Canon Spooner might have been much happier if some theological distinction had been attached to his name, but in history he will be the man who read the passion story about Jesus to his congregation, and when he came to one part, he read: “Now, Rababbas was a bobber.”

Canon Spooner would say “blushing crow” when he meant to say “crushing blow.” And he turned “conquering kings” into “Kinquering congs.”

Journalist and news commentator Edwin Newman tells the following:

I lived for a while in London. A foreign office man of my acquaintance treasured a semispoonerism committed by an American Aid official in Greece. The American, at the end of his assignment, was given a dinner by Greeks with whom he had worked. He knew no Greek; but it was thought that it would be pleasant if he could at any rate express his thanks in Greek. The word required was “EPHARISTO” and the American was told to remember it as though it were “F. Harry Stowe.” When the time came, he rose grandly and said, “My friends, all I can say to you is ‘Harry F. Stowe’.” Saying which, he sat down.

(The New Catholic Treasury of Wit and Humor edited by Paul Bussard, New York, Meredith Press, 1968 , p. 90)

Now, in today’s passage of Scripture in The Gospel of John, Jesus did not use a “Spoonerism”

but he did use a METAPHOR.

A metaphor is a figure of speech which states that the objects being compared are identical.

For instance:

Jim Richardson is an angel.

Oakland Avenue Church is the Body of Christ.

I am the good shepherd.

You will recognize immediately that the last example of a METAPHOR comes from the passage that I have just read to you. Jesus says: “ I am the good shepherd.” Now, I must confess to you that I have never been around sheep very much, and that is probably true for you as well. But even if our experience with sheep has been very limited, if we have grown up in the Christian church, the METAPHOR of Jesus being a good shepherd is a meaningful one.

The most famous passage in all of the Bible begins: “*The Lord is my shepherd...*”

In the church in which I grew up in the 1940s in Gainesville, Georgia, “The Poultry Capital of the World,” there was this huge stained-glass window in the sanctuary which showed a picture of Jesus as a shepherd; and I remember looking at it for many hours when I was supposed to be listening to the preacher! Did you grow up in a church like that? We grew up in Sunday

they knew the sound of his voice,
they knew the way that he walked.

Now, let me ask you something. If you were trying to understand what possibly this could say to 21st century Christians in South Carolina, what one word would you use?

I'll tell you what I thought of: **TRUST.**

The relationship between the shepherd and the sheep was one of **TRUST.**

I know very little about an automobile. And so, as I have lived in different cities through the years, I have needed a mechanic to service the car; and the question that I first ask about a mechanic is: CAN I TRUST HIM?

When I have needed medical attention for some illness or disease, I have placed myself under the care of a physician to follow his orders completely, only after I have satisfied myself with the answer to my question : CAN I TRUST HIM?

There have been occasions when I have wanted and needed to share my deepest feelings and fears and thoughts with another person, but I have never done so until I have satisfied myself with the answer to my question: CAN I TRUST HIM?

Jesus said: "I am the good shepherd."

Do we understand what Jesus was saying in that sentence, "I am the good shepherd" ?

He was saying: "You can **trust** me."

"He who is a hireling and not a shepherd,
whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming
and leaves the sheep and flees;
and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.
He flees because he is a hireling and cares nothing
for the sheep. *I am the good shepherd.*"

That is Jesus saying, "You can trust me."

TRUST is what makes a four month old baby smile and look deeply into his mother's eyes as he sucks hungrily from her breast.

TRUST is what makes a two year old come running into his daddy's arms when he is tired and hungry and scared.

TRUST is what makes a child who is ashamed and heart-broken come home

from school and tell his parents what has happened.

TRUST is what makes a young girl just going through puberty smile and understand the words coming from the lips of her mother.

TRUST is what makes a twenty year old son or daughter want to come home to wrestle with that is involved in being in love and making a life-long promise and getting married.

Jesus said: "I am the good shepherd."

"You can **trust** me."

William Barclay is one of my heroes in the faith. Listen to what he wrote:

The Jews had a lovely legend to explain why God chose Moses to be the leader of his people. "When Moses was feeding the sheep of his father-in-law in the wilderness, a young kid ran away. Moses followed it until it reached a ravine, where it found a well to drink from. When Moses got up to it, he said: "I did not know that you ran away because you were thirsty. Now you must be weary." He took the kid on his shoulders and carried it back. Then God said, "Because you have shown pity in leading back one of a flock belonging to a man, you shall lead my flock Israel."

(Barclay, William, The Gospel of John [Vol.2], Edinburgh, The Saint Andrew Press, 1960, p. 63.

Now, listen to this:

Who is God? God is Jesus.

And who is Jesus? He is a good shepherd.

And who is a good shepherd?

It is two o'clock in the morning. It is pitch-black night, and the child awakens with a fever of 103 degrees and is in pain and is frightened. But he is calmed and reassured by the his mother's cooling hand on his forehead. That is a good shepherd.

Or, the teen-ager's pain has been found to be caused by malfunctioning kidneys, and the physicians have said that unless a replacement for the kidney is found, the teen-ager will die; and so the kidney donor turns out to be the teen-ager's math teacher in high school.

That is a good shepherd.

Or, the young woman's graduation gown, worn so proudly and showing the Doctor of Philosophy Degree stripes so recently received, does not show the sacrificial love of the father who has worked two eight-hour shifts a day, unable to read and write and never having known the dignity of being called anything other than his first name, Rufus. That is a good shepherd.

Or, the Winthrop professor, having been crushed in an automobile accident on her way to church, is given immediate and professional first-aid care by the EMS attendant, who studies the various traumas to her body, watches her weakening vital signs, all the time talking to an emergency room physician in the trauma center at the hospital toward which the ambulance rushes. That is a good shepherd.

But JESUS, only in the Gospel of John, lays claim to be **THE good shepherd.**

Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd.....
the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

The Apostle Paul concludes:

What then shall we say to this? If God is for us, who is against us?.....Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?.....No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(Romans 8:31, 35, 37-39)