

Introductory

This material is exclusive to John. The LSB lectionary retains the tradition of the Fourth Sunday of Easter as *Good Shepherd Sunday*. The readings for A, B, and C are all taken from the tenth chapter of John, from different sections. The reading for C year has Jesus at Temple, continuing to use the sheep metaphor to explain His identity of and His relationship with his followers.

What He has said, beginning especially with His intervention into the stoning of the adulterous woman, which ended with them wanting to stone Him, continuing in this chapter with Him using the sheep metaphor, has caused a **“division among the Jews,”** which happens several times in John. Now the division morphs into open, public conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders,

Pastors should know about sheep and shepherds, because that’s who we are, but not only because that’s who we are. They should know a lot about sheep and shepherds because the Bible talks a lot about sheep and shepherds. Knowing more about sheep and shepherds helps us to better understand the teachings of the Bible, also helping us to better understand our role as shepherds.

Knowing those things, we can pass them on to the flock, helping them to better understand the Bible. To state the obvious; you can’t pass along what you yourself don’t know. As with most research, a good place to start research for shepherding is Wikipedia. William Barclay quotes from *The Land and The Book* by William Thomson (I now own it) for insights into Bible times.

Talking to a shepherd is another way to learn about them. I once had an enlightening conversation with a real shepherd when we lived in Montana. Most Americans don’t know much about shepherding because we don’t do much of it. It bears some similarities to ranching, and to raising cattle and pigs, which people around here know a lot more about, but there are dissimilarities.

People around here raise cows and pigs to be sent to the butcher and made into meat. They don’t get too attached to their animals. My wife’s aunts ran some cattle, and they named one “Timmy.” But Timmy got injured, and the other cows were mean to him, so Timmy was sent to the butcher. When it came back from the butcher, it was no longer Timmy. They called, they said, “meat.”

Jesus the Good Shepherd does not draw sheep to Himself in order to make them into meat. Sheep were used mostly for their wool, and you can milk them, but they don’t like it, but their milk is very tasty. Have I mentioned the Pecorino Toscano cheese we enjoyed while we stayed at the castle in Tuscany? It’s made from sheep milk. Not the Pecorino Romano, which is not as good.

The point of comparison – as He has made abundantly clear previous to this – is the shepherd’s role as the protector of the sheep. I was looking at the Ordination vows, and I was surprised that there is no vow for the Shepherd to be willing to die for the sheep. Maybe it’s implied. Or maybe it’s assumed that you vowed to be willing to die rather than depart from the faith at Confirmation.

You can wax eloquent from the pulpit about how sometimes the shepherd has to be harsh, for the good of the sheep, that the shepherd feeds the sheep on Word and Sacrament, and you can quote from Psalm 23 and the rest. That’s all fine and good, but Jesus has spoken of thieves and wolves who are always there, seen or unseen, actively waiting for a chance to injure or kill the sheep.

God uses metaphors and other figures of speech all the time. We learned them at seminary in the context of exegesis (WAM’s Blue Sheet), but we did not learn them in the context of preaching, and we should have. It’s not too late. Wikipedia has a very thorough *Figures of Speech* page with lots of links to other pages. I suppose you could buy a book, like *Figures of Speech in the Bible*.

When I look at that – again – I marvel – again – at how much E.W. Bullinger, a simple Anglican country parson, accomplished in a lifetime. The exception to the Wikipedia first rule is if you’re doing research on the pastoral office. In that case I would start with Gregory the Great’s *Pastoral Care*. I would start there, and I would stop there. Ok, maybe throw in Fritz’s *Pastoral Theology*.

Textual Notes

22. John sets the scene for us, saying “Ἐγένετο τότε τὰ ἐνκαίνια ἐν τοῖς Ἱεροσολύμοις· χειμὼν ἦν – then came to pass the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, it was winter.” This festival is known today as Hanukkah, a festival commemorating the dedication of the Second Temple. Review OT history, particularly the Babylonian Captivity and the building of what is known as Ezra’s Temple.

Israel was long gone by the time Judah was taken away to Babylon in 587 B.C., to return in 520, due mostly to the efforts of Queen Esther and a timely regime change. Jerusalem has been left waste, and so had Temple, and Ezra and Nehemiah led the efforts to rebuild Temple first, then the city, and they were constantly harassed in those efforts by the Samaritans, descended from Israel.

As you know, John likes him his double entendre, and he has made it abundantly clear from the beginning of his Gospel that Jesus is the presence of God among His People, replacing Temple, the former dwelling place of God. That Jesus appears at Temple at the festival recalling the dedication of Temple is...interesting. So is his mentioning the obvious, that the time is “winter.”

That word, translated like that by all the translations I’m looking at, often means “stormy.” If you look at the six occurrences in the NT – and context clearly shows meaning in all of them – it’s

about half and half. Everybody knows that Hanukkah happens in winter (November-December), and in addition to that, the storm clouds are gathering, and they will soon be trying to stone Him.

23. John continues, “καὶ περιεπάτει ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ ἐν τῇ στοᾷ τοῦ Σολομῶνος – and Jesus was walking round in the Temple on the porch of Solomon.” I also find it interesting – in an ironic sort of way – that the third Temple, “Herod’s Temple,” – actually an extensive rebuild – was being built during the life of Jesus. Meanwhile Temple Jesus goes in and out of Temple frequently.

Now we find God present again at the place where one would expect to find the presence of God among His People, in the portico of Solomon, the place where the Rabbis often went to answer questions and to teach. We first find Him there as a twelve-year-old, and He goes there often to do what you do there, and two weeks ago we saw Peter and John spending a lot of time there also.

24. When the Apostle John, who is a Jew, talks about “the Jews,” as in “ἐκύκλωσαν οὖν αὐτὸν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι – the Jews gathered around Him,” he is talking about those who oppose Jesus, mostly the religious leaders, much in the same manner that I, who am a Lutheran, will sometimes talk about “the Lutherans,” and I’m talking mostly about Pastors and other teachers from within the LCMS.

To say that the enemies of Jesus “gathered around Him” sort of gives a picture of a gathering not unlike football players at the rip of yet another ACL or a children’s sermon. This is not a friendly crowd. The word “kuklao” occurs four times in NT; Luke 21:20, Hebrews 11:30, Acts 14:20, and here, and it means “to encircle, besiege, surround,” like Antifas routinely does to guys like me.

They encircled and besieged Jesus, “καὶ ἔλεγον αὐτῷ Ἔως πότε τὴν ψυχὴν ἡμῶν αἴρεις; εἰ σὺ εἶ ὁ Χριστός, εἰπὸν ἡμῖν παρρησίᾳ - and said to Him, ‘Until when will you keep our souls in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us openly.’” We note a touch of sarcasm here, a figure of speech consisting of “the use of irony to mock or convey contempt,” and we feel their contempt for Him.

You use sarcasm when you engage in banter with friendlies, and it’s all in fun, and when you have contempt for enemies, and it escalates, rather than dampens the conflict, and never do you use it on your wife. Paul uses it a lot when writing to the Corinthians, and not in a bantering sort of a way, and they were corks. Jesus will use it – they started it – in the last verse of this pericope.

The RSV et al “How long will you keep us in suspense?” picks up the sarcasm, and the literal question “How long will you take away our life?” is an idiom, which is a different kind of figure of speech. In its usage, this idiom is meant to express annoyance and irritation at the person at whom it is directed, sort of like Moe used to get annoyed at Curly. “Why you...I oughta...”

Or how about our idiom “you’re starting to get on my nerves.” No, I don’t think Jesus was getting on their nerves at all. Yes, I’m being sarcastic. One commentator thinks that the gist of their question is something like; “Who do you think you are? God?” Since Jesus has actually already said several times that He is God (“I am,”) I can buy that. They say they want Him to speak clearly.

25. He responds, “ἀπεκρίθη αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς Εἶπον ὑμῖν, καὶ οὐ πιστεύετε – Jesus answered them, ‘I told you, and you did not believe.’” I have been in discussions like this with people, who say that “I don’t understand,” but they understand perfectly, but they don’t agree with what you are saying, so I suppose it’s a feigned ignorance, because Jesus has made it clear that He is the Christ.

I got into that kind of discussion about nine years ago, and after about an hour and twenty-six minutes I just said “I have explained it as well as I can explain it, and I can’t explain it any more. I’m sorry that I’m not better at explaining things.” Everybody else in the room knew what was going on, and for those people to insist that Jesus explain something He had thoroughly covered...

But I suppose anybody can – and did – claim to be the Christ, but “τὰ ἔργα ἃ ἐγὼ ποιῶ ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ Πατρὸς μου, ταῦτα μαρτυρεῖ περὶ ἐμοῦ – the works I do in the name of My Father, these bear witness concerning Me.” The works to which He refers are the multitude of miracles He has done, things not done by any others, things that bear silent testimony to Him being Christ.

26. Returning to the pastoral metaphor from whence He has come, Jesus emphatically tells them “ἀλλὰ ὑμεῖς οὐ πιστεύετε, ὅτι οὐκ ἐστὲ ἐκ τῶν προβάτων τῶν ἐμῶν – but you don’t believe because you are not from my flock.” It’s true. The corollary to that truth can be found earlier, where Jesus stated that His sheep recognize His voice, they listen to and follow Him. These men, not so much.

In the days of Jesus several flocks were often kept in one pen overnight, when danger from predators was greatest. It was not uncommon, for example, for all the village sheep to be put into one common pen overnight for safe keeping. How were they then separated out in the morning? The only way of which I am aware was that each of the sheep recognized the voice of its shepherd.

These days, the sheep hear the voice of the Good Shepherd in the voice of the Pastor, the Under shepherd. Go ahead and say it. It’s your job. If you don’t say it, then who will? It’s awkward for everybody... The Acts text for today makes clear what we’re talking about when we talk about the Divine Call. It was God who placed them, and that it is God who places us where we are.

That’s even more awkward, especially for the people who want you to leave. Paul calls those men divinely called to Ephesus “Elders” and what do you call the man who watches over the sheep? In other places, they’re called “Bishops” or “overseers.” All those terms refer to the one, apostolic, prophetic, Pastoral Office. Those who don’t want to hear the pure Word are not of the flock.

27. If you didn’t hear it the first time, then “τὰ πρόβατα τὰ ἐμὰ τῆς φωνῆς μου ἀκούουσιν, καὶ γινώσκω αὐτά, καὶ ἀκολουθοῦσίν μοι – my sheep hear my voice and I know them, and they follow Me.” The sheep hear the voice of the shepherd and follow that shepherd, and on His part the Shepherd knows His Sheep, and that’s on the Pastor. We should get to know the assigned flock.

28. Being a sheep, known by the Good Shepherd, is a good thing, “καὶ γὰρ δίδωμι αὐτοῖς ζωὴν αἰώνιον – and I give to them eternal life.” The verb is in the present tense; eternal life is presently ours, lived here on this earth for now, lived in heaven when we leave here. Which is to say that eternal life is ours presently, i.e. this life we are now living is the life that will continue in heaven.

And furthermore, “καὶ οὐ μὴ ἀπόλονται εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, καὶ οὐχ ἄρπάσει τις αὐτὰ ἐκ τῆς χειρὸς μου – and they shall never perish, and nobody will be able to snatch them out of my hand.” The sheep belong to the Father, who gives them to the Son. Satan can’t have them. The main verb is “to be able” and “snatch away” is a present active infinitive that connotes sudden, often violent action.

The word appears several times in Matthew and John, and almost always it’s Satan doing the snatching. The same verb has just been used by Jesus in v. 12 in connection with the wolf taking the sheep, after the hireling had fled. At the top of the list of satanic priorities is the snatching away of Christians from the flock and Kingdom of God to the flock and kingdom of Satan.

The present infinitive active indicates not only continuous action, but also that the snatching away of Christians is very much part and parcel of Satan’s core character. He likes snatching, he’s good at it, and he is very passionate about it. That might scare people, and rightly so, but Satan is not to be feared, because Jesus has defeated him, which is one of the core themes of the Easter Season.

29. The Son continues to talk about the Father – He does that a lot, “Πατὴρ μου ὃ δέδωκέν μοι πάντων μεῖζόν ἐστιν – My Father, Who has given them to Me, is greater than all,” speaks to the omnipotence of The Father – God is all-powerful. He has personally chosen those particular sheep, and He has given them to The Son, all of which things are within His power and authority to do.

And in case you didn’t hear this the first time, “καὶ οὐδεὶς δύναται ἄρπάξαι ἐκ τῆς χειρὸς τοῦ Πατρὸς – and nobody is able to snatch from the hand of the Father.” Actually, in the previous verse, He had talked about how Satan can’t snatch Christians out of the hand of The Son. In this verse, He is talking about how Satan can’t snatch Christians out of the hand of The Father.

30. Then He sort of clears that up by pointing out that those two statements are tautology, “ἐγὼ καὶ ὁ Πατὴρ ἓν ἐσμεν – I and the Father are One.” To say that Satan is unable to snatch you out of the hand of The Son is essentially the same thing as saying that Satan is unable to snatch you out of the hand of the Father because they are of the same Essence, but they are not the same Person.

A study of Jesus use of “I am” in the Gospel of John – who likes double entendre – is enlightening. “I am,” of course, is the OT personal name of God (English translations; Jehovah, Yahweh, LORD), and the religious leaders were well aware of this. I think Jesus is messing with them, “I am” the door, “I am” the Good Shepherd, et al. Finally (8:59), “before Abraham was, I am.”

If you read ahead one verse, not included in today’s reading, realizing what Jesus had just said, “they took up stones to throw at Him.” The response to “I and the Father are one,” is the same; “They took up stones *again* to stone Him.” The Jews don’t think Jesus was God, and they think that Jesus never said that He was God, but those people who wanted to stone would disagree.

Law/Gospel

Outsider/Insider - Jesus is considered by the Pharisees to be the outsider to God's family and Kingdom. They consider themselves to be the insiders, the holders of the teachings and traditions of God's People. Jesus, of course, is not an outsider. He is actually the ultimate insider; "I and the Father are one." Jesus, the ultimate insider, is regarded as the ultimate outsider when He is forsaken by the Father. This was done so that those who follow Him, the Christians, would be regarded as insiders in God's family and Kingdom.

Our modern society frowns on such talk. It sounds like the Christians think they have a special relationship with a Special God or something and that somehow God regards us as special. As for the Christians, especially the spiritual and religious ones, they think that such talk would turn off the outsider to Christianity, the cardinal sin of our time. What we actually end up doing is using every gimmick we can think of to attract the visitor, and then we bend over backwards to get them to come back. The outsider ends up thinking that we really need him.

Not only do I think it's ok for Christians to think of themselves as special insiders, members of God's family and Kingdom, I think that they *should* think of themselves in this way. One way to create pathos (that's a good thing) in the listener is to make him think that he is part of the group. In this regard we can assure our Christian listeners that they are part of God's group and it will make them feel good.. That's the kind of thing preachers ought to be doing to make people feel good in the right way. It's the truth, and it makes them feel good, and it makes the visitor want to be a part of the special group that we call "Christians."

Alone/Cared For - The lone sheep does not do very well. The sheep owned by a good shepherd receives outstanding care. One of the main differences between shepherding and ranching is that sheep were used in New Testament times primarily for milk and wool, meaning that you didn't normally kill them. Cattle are raised almost exclusively to be killed and eaten. The Christian does not go through life alone. She is part of the flock, and through the Pastor and the Church, by means of Word and Sacrament, is nurtured, protected, and cared for.

Guilt/Innocence - Jesus talks to the Pharisees about their guilt, always a risky business. Just try going down to the mall and calling people "sinners...guilty" and see what that gets you. It's even worse when you have say it to your flock from the pulpit, but that is our task. Most Lutherans come to church understanding that they are "poor, miserable sinners," but not all. Given the loose morality of our time, we need to remind people of exactly what is sin and the guilt that comes with sin and the punishment that comes with the guilt. We also especially need to preach the Law against Phariseism, which will always be a part of the LCMS mix. Then the Gospel.

Death/Life - The sheep who belong to The Good Shepherd will never die (v. 28).

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