

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Fourth Sunday after Easter
May 8, 2022
Sermon by Pastor Christopher Pflughoeft

You are sheep

²² Then the Festival of Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³and Jesus was walking in the temple area in Solomon's Colonnade.

²⁴ So the Jews gathered around Jesus, asking, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."

²⁵ Jesus answered them, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I am doing in my Father's name testify about me. ²⁶ But you do not believe, because you are not my sheep, as I said to you. ²⁷ My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all. No one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one."

—John 10:22-30

Baaa! I see a room full of sheep. Sheeple. You just do what you are told don't you? You don't discern. You just follow. Do you think? No, you just are sheep. Grazing safely in your flock. Okay, sheeple. Baaa! Baaa!

In our current political climate, calling people sheep is an insult. It happens on both sides. You are sheep for listening to your side. The more enlightened people who disagree with you accuse you of not thinking critically. They call you sheep. You see it scrolling in the comments of TikTok and Twitter. It's an insult to be called sheep.

Today though, I look to you and say, "**You are sheep.**" Yet, this is not an insult. This is a wonderful truth. You are Jesus' flock. He is your Good Shepherd. **You are sheep. Sheep listen and follow. Sheep are safe and secure.**

Our reading for today immediately follows the Good Shepherd discourse in John's writing, but it occurs two months later. This takes place during Hanukkah. During this Hanukkah, Jesus was teaching at the temple. Not in the sanctuary, but in Solomon's Colonnade. Solomon's Colonnade was like an old porch. Staying warm from the crisp December weather, Jesus taught.

While he was teaching, a group of unbelieving Jewish people confronted Jesus with a pointed question. They asked if he would tell them plainly if he was the Christ. Based on Jesus' answer, we can tell that their question was not sincere. Perhaps their question was a trap. Perhaps they wanted to catch Jesus saying that he was the Christ so that they could kill him for 'blasphemy.' Nevertheless, in Jesus' stern response to the unbelieving Jewish people, he speaks words that are tremendously comforting to believers, his sheep. **You are sheep.**

After pointing out that he has clearly shown himself to be the Christ, Jesus indicates that the reason they did not see his statements as plain is their fault. They heard him and did not believe. They are not his sheep.

Then, Jesus moves to talk about the characteristics of his sheep. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He cares for and loves his sheep. He even would go on to live and die for his sheep. Now, his sheep have their loving response to the fact that they are known in an intimate way by the Good Shepherd. They hear his voice. They not only hear, but they listen and follow. Jesus' sheep follow him.

Let's examine this short parable that Jesus tells. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. His voice is heard for us through the Bible. The Bible is comprised of two parts, law and gospel. The sheep, who are the believers, hear Jesus' voice of the gospel which gives them life. Then, they hear his voice of the law as a guide in their lives. It is a guide as they follow him.

I do not think this sheep illustration needs much explanation. Partially because Jesus did not explain it ineptly for his hearers. This may have been because shepherding was a common profession, and his audience would easily understand this. I also will not explain it ineptly because I am a city boy who never spent much time on a farm and am therefore ill-equipped to talk about the characteristics and behavior of farm animals. Yet, I believe that the illustration is easy for city folk to understand. Sheep know their shepherd's voice. Sheep listen to their shepherd. Then, sheep follow their shepherd. **You are sheep.** Christians are sheep. We know our Good Shepherd's voice. We listen to Jesus. We follow Jesus. **You are sheep. Sheep listen and follow.**

Do you listen to the voice of Jesus and follow him? Do people accuse you of being sheeple? Since you are here at church listening to this sermon, It would be safe to assume that you know the voice of your Good Shepherd. You have heard his voice and you know it. He called you to faith. You are part of his flock.

Although I know you know the voice of the shepherd, I do want to warn you to discern the voices you here. There are many voices speaking. Many claims being made. Be sure to be clear that what you listen to truly comes from your Shepherd. Yes, heed the warning your Shepherd gives, *“For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will perform great signs and wonders so as to deceive even the elect, if it were possible.”* (Matthew 24:24)

As I see it, a huge place where false doctrines or voices which claim to be from the Good Shepherd, which are really lies, are prevalent is on social media. Perhaps this is because the algorithm knows how to suck me into engagement. Perhaps this is because many voices get a platform.

It does not matter which platform, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, or Facebook, this happens. Voices come saying why Jesus doesn't actually condemn homosexuality, why its unloving to say that people go to hell, why its old-fashioned chauvinism that doesn't allow women to be pastors.

These voices can be very enticing to me. They say what my itching ears want to hear. They support what they teach by misapplying what the Shepherd says.

Are you ever tempted to listen to the other voices? The voices that say doctrine doesn't matter. The voices that say sin doesn't matter. The voices that say a multitude of half-truths and lies. I certainly am. Listening to those voices over the voice of our Good Shepherd is sin. You know that. Desiring to listen to those voices over the voice of our Good Shepherd is sin as well.

Let us not desire to nor listen to the voices of the false christs and the deceivers. Instead, let us, like the sheep that we are, listen to the voice of our Shepherd. The voice that says you are forgiven for your improper desires. You are forgiven for you failure to discern the voices you hear. The voice of the Shepherd who gave his life for his sheep. Listen to the voice of Jesus your Savior, your Good Shepherd. This voice gives you comfort and peace. Yes, **you are sheep.** Sheep listen and follow.

Sheep listen and follow their shepherd. We, follow our Good Shepherd, Jesus. He leads us into safe pasture. He gives us comfort and peace. He makes us safe and secure. You are sheep.

After Jesus, the Good Shepherd, speaks about characteristics of his sheep, he continues to talk about how he keeps them safe and secure. Jesus gives them eternal life. His sheep will not die. They will not perish. No. They will live forever. This is the eternal bliss of heaven. Jesus rose from the grave and He will raise his sheep, believers, to live forever with him in heaven. He holds them close. He will not let them go. They are secure in His hands. They are secure in the hands of their God. He defends them from their enemies.

I have asked before if any artists out there would be willing to paint a picture for me. The picture that I would like to see is Jesus as the Good Shepherd. Not Jesus the Good Shepherd holding a nice cuddly lamb on his shoulders. Instead, I would like to see the Good Shepherd defending the sheep from the wolves trying to attack. Perhaps, in this rendition, the Shepherd would be fending of a wolf with his staff. For some artistic flare, I think it would be nice to turn the end of that staff into a resemblance of the cross. If someone painted this picture, it would be framed and hanging in my office. This is what Jesus the Good Shepherd does. He keeps his sheep safe and secure by defending them from the wolves that attack. The ultimate way that he did this was on the cross. This is why Jesus' sheep are safe and secure.

You are sheep. Sheep are safe and secure. The voice of your Good Shepherd, Jesus, tells you this message of confidence. There is confidence because of what he did. Jesus laid down his life for his sheep. He is the lamb who was slain. Therefore, his sheep are safe and secure for eternity. They have confidence.

Sadly, there are voices that speak against the assurance that Christ gives. There are voices that claim to be in-line with that of the Good Shepherd but they say something very different. Some voices say that you cannot have confidence in the eternal security that Jesus gives. They point people away from what Jesus said and did. Then, they point people to look toward foolish little things that are worthless. Things like their own works, rituals, and rites.

Do not curve inward to try and find security. Do not look out to worthless things. Instead, listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd who has made you safe and secure. Look to what he has done. See what he gives you. Your confidence of safety and security in eternity come from the objective fact that Jesus Christ lived, died, and rose. Your safety comes from Jesus. Your security comes from Jesus. Then listen to Jesus and what he gives you. Jesus gives you gifts that strengthen you. Through the Bible, the Holy Spirit creates and sustains faith. The Good Shepherd also gives baptism. You can look back to your baptism and say I am baptized into Christ. You can have confidence in your safety and security. The Good Shepherd also feeds you with the food of immortality. He gives

you His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. Listen to your Good Shepherd. Receive the gifts that he gives you. **You are sheep.** Sheep are safe and secure.

Okay, sheeple. That is not an insult. **You are sheep** who belong to the Good Shepherd, Jesus. Sheep listen and follow. Listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd. Discern what he says to you as opposed to the dangerous words of others. Sheep are safe and secure. Jesus gives you confidence in your eternally security. You will live forever in heaven because Jesus lived, died, and rose. Amen.