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SERMON TITLE: "Jesus: *The Good Shepherd*"
SCRIPTURE: John 10:1-18
DATE: June 3, 2018
Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

READ John 10:1-18

Did you see the marriage of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle? The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, wraps his clergy stole around the man and woman's hands as they are clasped together and declared: "Those whom God has joined together, let no one put asunder." The choir then sings, *The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you and give you peace.*¹

Belonging to the Lord is like a marriage that is never put asunder. Being in union with the Lord is the entryway to abundant blessing. As you read, listen for the care. Pay attention to the ownership. Hear what it means to belong to *The Good Shepherd*. READ John 10:1-18

Do you remember being in love for the first time, even if it was seventh grade? Remember how you felt in early marriage? Do you remember taking a look at your child or grandchild, or a niece, nephew or a friend's new baby for the first time? Have you missed a loved one who has left and you long to see them again?

That's the kind of love and care expressed in this passage.

But there's also a thief, a robber, a hired hand, and wolves. This describes life as we know it. Though you may not herd sheep, each detail of this story is very relevant. Love and challenges. Devotion and trials. John's purpose is to help us see the incredible richness of our secure relationship with the Shepherd in the valleys of life.

There are two scenes. The first one takes place in the morning in the village. The second one takes place in the evening in the wilderness. Both of them have threats—in the evening wolves and other savage wild animals threaten. In the village there are thieves and robbers. Threats are our reality.

Do you have a security system in your home? Do you use it?

We have a security system. It makes me feel secure, although it has worked mostly by operator error. One of us opens the door very early in the morning, forgetting that the alarm was set. It goes off, and notifies the security company who calls us and asks for our password, which neither of us can remember. They then call the police, who call us and say, "Again, Mrs. Hertenstein? Your password is the name of your dead cat." I get it right and all is well. ☺

Jesus points us to a much better security system.

In the village, groups of families come together and arrange for a shepherd from one of the families to herd all their combined sheep. The neighborhood sheep pen would have sturdy walls, maybe a roof, and a solid door. The door is God's security system.

In the village, robbers—violent predators—come at night to steal, kill, and destroy. They climb walls or get in through the roof or any way they can, just like robbers might climb in through a window today.

But the shepherd knows the gatekeeper and enters through the door. He calls his sheep and they know his voice.

Each morning the sheep are taken out of the pen and each smaller group to their own shepherd. To get them out is not that easy; each shepherd stands in the street and gives his own call—sometimes a cadence. Others may call by name. The sheep "know his voice" because he has been with them, fed them, and trained them.

Do you have a pet you call by name? When I was growing up I had a horse named Jill. My dad would go into the field, whistle, and holler out, "Here Jill." She would lift up her head and come trotting to him. Not to me though. I was not the one who fed her.

He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. If you are able, watch this video.²

¹ Prince Harry & Meghan Markle's Royal Wedding 2018 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fFz6PU2E67E>, acc. May 29, 2018.
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² "Calling the Sheep," see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UVAIRW1lxem>, accessed May 29, 2018.

They come to him because they belong to him.

Do you recognize Jesus' voice? Have you ever been someplace, perhaps late at night, that you feel uneasy. Or there are strong influences around you that call you to do this or try that. If you intently listen, you can discern the quiet but sure voice of Jesus. He will show you the way out of threatening places because he is present in danger, helps you resist unhealthy cultural influences, and leads you to safety.

Going with Jesus is protection.

But we are often tempted to turn away from Jesus' voice and follow the prevailing voices of influence which lure people by enticing promises. Those loud mouths call for self-reliance rather than reliance on God. They proclaim freedom is found in false values, and issue threats if we do not conform. "Follow this popular route, not that God-driven, restrictive one," they say, deceptively.

We can easily be persuaded by the voices of power, prosperity, and popularity if we are not familiar with and accustomed to our Shepherd's voice.

Jesus' voice does not intimidate, discourage or mislead us with false messages. He simply calls us to follow. We must be intent on hearing our Shepherd's words and trust where he leads, even if there are obstacles. Whose voice do you listen to? If you are able, take a look at this video.³

The shepherd leads his flock into the pastures. As summer passes, he has to go farther and farther to find good grazing, requiring nights to be spent in the wilderness. Wild animals become the great threat. Remember that King David as a shepherd had experiences of fighting off lions and bears and killing them. This gave him the courage to fight Israel's enemy, Goliath (see 1 Samuel 17:32-37).

The sheep pen in the wilderness has walls made of stone with briars and brambles placed on top. It has an opening rather than a door. The shepherd lies down in the doorway to protect the sheep.

Like the shepherd, Jesus places his life on the line for you. Jesus is devoted to your well-being. He will not abandon you in times of trouble. And you will walk together into what the Psalmist calls "the valley of the shadow of death." It is the human condition on earth to be confronted with these valleys; things that threaten us like a wolf, lion, or

bear, but Jesus is with you. Jesus knows you and is committed to you and will keep you from evil.

But there's more than just hearing a voice from above. God speaks to us in a variety of ways. You have prayer. You have counsel from the body of Christ. You have the Scriptures. That is God's voice.

Do you ever get an old fashioned letter that comes in the mail? My father used to write me letters all the time and when I read them, I could actually hear his voice. I loved his letters, and still cherish them.

The writers of Scripture have preserved the lives of believers who followed God, leaving us with a pathway. Hearing God's voice in Scripture is personal communication. Reading Scripture is not just an intellectual endeavor. It is not just about getting the right answer or doing our duty. We are gathered into his fold; accepted into a great family that crosses into all nations around the globe.

So Jesus calls. Jesus is the door for us, through which we enter into abundant life. Jesus lays down his life for us, where if we make other people our god—false shepherds cannot deliver. They abandon us in times of trouble. But *The Good Shepherd*, the one sent by God knows us; calls us; provides for us; leads us; disciplines us out of love; and we will hear his voice of devotion.

Jesus came to call all his sheep, which are scattered all over the world to accept them into his fold. We go out and talk about him and spread his good news. Wherever we are, wherever we go—it's not an accident, and those we talk to will hear his voice. We are part of calling others.

This passage speaks of Jesus' death and resurrection. This is something Jesus was given the power to do by God. Jesus has the power both to lay down his life and the power to take it up. It was given him before the cross! Jesus took on this death in a great battle with evil which he WINS by resurrection. He did it voluntarily. No one took his life; Jesus gives it willingly. He is given the greatest victory of all time—*He conquers death*. No human, not Pilate or the Jews took his life. He gave it. He was resurrected. This is the proof of his divinity.

Do you know and follow the Good Shepherd? Are you part of the family? The result is life abundant.

AMEN

³ "Calling Sheep," see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Holr54eF4LY>, accessed May 29, 2018.