

Dear Fellow Sheep of the Good Shepherd,

One summer, my dad decided I needed to work. So he found a farmer that could use a helping hand. I picked rock and baled hay.

The farmer kept sheep. One day I was mowing the lawn when I noticed a lamb outside the fence bleating at its mother. I herded the lamb, opened the gate, and sent the lamb to its mother. The same thing happened several more times. When the farmer came home for lunch, I told him what had happened. He immediately went out and fixed the gate so the lamb stayed inside.

In that short time, I learned something about sheep. They aren't very smart. They need a shepherd.

God uses the sheep/shepherd illustration throughout the Bible. It applies to us. We aren't always smart. We need a shepherd to watch out for us and to lead us. That's why we say today,

RESURRECTION CHRISTIANS FOLLOW THE GOOD SHEPHERD

I. First of all, because he laid down his life for the sheep. Twice in our text you hear Jesus saying that wonderful truth.

Jesus is our substitute in facing the wrath of God over our sins. He willingly suffered the brutality of the cross in order to atone for our sins once and for all.

Why can Jesus do this for us? It is because he is the only one who is both God and man at the same time. He became human so that he could take our place. That meant keeping all the laws of God that we have broken. Because he is God, he kept those laws perfectly, and gave his holiness to us as a gift. Then he went to the cross and suffered for us. As the risen Savior God, he makes his sacrificial death effective to forgive the sins of all people.

This is what makes Jesus unique. There are many religious leaders, past and present, who claim they have a better way to heaven than what Jesus had. Many have created their own religion. But none of them have saved a single soul. Their message is the same. Follow the rules of the religion I have invented, the do's and the don't's; be a good person toward others and you will get to my version of heaven.

But it doesn't work. As Paul says in Romans, **"No one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law."** And then he says, **"For we maintain that a person is justified by faith, apart from the works of the law."** Salvation is by grace alone.

II. Since it is only by faith in Jesus that we are saved, we follow the Good Shepherd because he is the only one we can trust.

Jesus uses the illustration of the hired man. **"The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep."** He's only there because it's a paying job. When he's watching the flock and there is a threat, he thinks of himself first. **"When he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away."** That leaves the flock to be ravaged and scattered.

There are preachers like that. Some seem more concerned with their own well-being than with the people they serve. They try to build up their reputation so they can make more money. They don't really care that much for the flock. When the devil attacks the flock with some false teaching, they look the other way rather than doing what is right.

Think how different Jesus is. He is intimately involved with us. That starts with his relationship with God the Father. **"The Father knows me and I know the Father,"** Jesus says. They are working together for the benefit of the sheep, the believers.

That intimate relationship mirrors the relationship Jesus has with us. He says, **“I know my sheep and my sheep know me.”** The Good Shepherd loves his sheep and cares for us. We love him in return, thanking him daily for saving us. This relationship is based on faith. Our Good Shepherd, through his Word, teaches us to trust him, no matter what is happening in our lives. He cares for us in times of sorrow and in times of joy. Through his word he comforts us and guides us through life.

How can we be sure he will do this? Remember what he said, **“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”** The risen Savior is not going to abandon those he saved, even when times are difficult, even when you and I are weak in faith, even when you and I are unsure what the future holds. Our good shepherd is always there for us.

III. You know that. You have experienced the joy of having men come from Texas, California, and Washington to serve you and lead you during this vacancy. That tells you that you are part of a much larger flock of believers. This is what our Good Shepherd promises, **“I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also.”** That’s happening right now through the Gospel.

You see, we follow the Good Shepherd because he gathers us into one flock. How does he do that? **“They will listen to my voice and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.”** How do we hear his voice? We open our ears and listen to the Word of God being proclaimed to us, whether through a sermon or a Bible Class or however the Scriptures are spoken to us. Isn’t this why you come to church - to hear the voice of God as delivered by an undershepherd of the Good Shepherd?

We hear that voice of Jesus at home as well. We read our Bibles. Are we doing that or are we neglecting our personal study? How about the other tools God has given us so we can hear his voice? We have our Catechism that explains Law and Gospel clearly. We have devotional material like Meditations to help us in our growth of faith. These tools are Jesus speaking to us.

Are we listening to his voice? Or are we side-tracked by all the business of life? Are we so involved in our popular culture, so concerned with keeping up with modern trends, that we fail to give time to listen to the voice of Jesus? Are we too focused on how much we are earning, or how much we have invested in a home or a bank account, rather than focusing on the voice of the one who gives us true wealth, wealth for our souls?

If we have sins to confess here, take them to the Lord. We sorrow over our misplaced attention. We seek forgiveness for our sins of neglecting his voice. We resolve to listen to him daily through his Word. We cling to the Good Shepherd in faith.

Remember the goal of Jesus. **“There shall be one flock and one shepherd.”** That goal is being achieved every day as more and more people become members of the Holy Christian Church. The Holy Christian Church is the gathering of all who truly believe that Jesus is the only Savior from sin, the only hope in this dark world.

We have the privilege as believers of adding to that flock. We do that as we raise our children to listen to the voice of Jesus. We bring them to Sunday School. We bring them to Confirmation Class. We involve them in home devotions. And we always have the opportunity to reach out to friends and neighbors and co-workers with the good news of our risen Savior. We share with them our joy in Christ, our joy in being sheep of the Good Shepherd.

It is the Holy Spirit who brings people to faith. But when we speak with the voice of Jesus, we are putting the Spirit to work in another person’s life. What a privilege that is. And what a joy it is to listen to our Good Shepherd daily. Jesus tends his flock every day to keep us

firmly in his sheep pen. My friends, as resurrection Christians, follow our Good Shepherd.
Amen.