**March 3, 2024 John 10:14-18**

***Laying Down Power***

**Scripture:** *John 10:14-18 NRSV*

*(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."*

**Notes:**

1. “The Lord is my ***shepherd***…
   1. Moses and King David were both ***shepherds***.
   2. Jesus is in fact the ***Messiah.***
   3. Jesus is ***willing*** to lay down his life for his sheep.
2. Jesus is the Good ***Shepherd***.
   1. The Pharisees recognize Jesus’s ***references*** right away.
   2. Jesus’ presence equates with the ***year*** of the Lord.
3. What’s the relationship between ***Sheep*** and ***Shepherds***.
   1. ***Sheep*** tend to wander and are vulnerable to predators.
   2. ***Shepherds*** were often in danger themselves.
   3. ***Shepherds*** have a unique call for their sheep.
   4. Jesus emphasizes that his ***sheep*** know him.
4. ***Laying*** ***Down*** His Life for the sheep.
   1. The shepherd is ***walking*** with the sheep.
   2. One lost sheep is more ***important***.
   3. Jesus ***willingly*** takes on the role of the sacrificed lamb.
   4. The kingdom of God is about ***sacrifices*** for others.
5. ***Living*** the Way of the Good Shepherd.
   1. ***Follow*** the voice of the Good Shepherd.
   2. ***Embody*** the self-giving love of Christ.
   3. Give up ***powers*** or ***privileges*** out of love for others.
   4. Join in the glory of the ***resurrection***.
6. During Lent we give up or ***sacrifice***.
   1. Lay down the things of the world, ***connect*** with God.
   2. ***Respond*** to the voice of the Good Shepherd.

**Script:**

Have you ever looked at a sheep? I remember the first time I looked at a sheep up close. I was not impressed, I found it to be rather dirty, I thought it was a rather unintelligent animal. Yet throughout Scripture we are referred to as sheep**.**

During the Pandemic, this became an insult. Those who followed the mandate to stay at home were called sheep. Those who wore facemasks were called sheep. Those who received the vaccine were called sheep. I wonder if we who did these things were called sheep; Were the rest considered to be goats?

In scripture we find many places where God’s people are referred to as sheep. And if we are his sheep then he must be our shepherd. No passage demonstrates this better than John 10:14-18. Today I ask that you would stand with me, Turn in your Bibles to John 10, and share in the reading of verses 14-18

*(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." John 10:14-18 NRSV*

Psalm 23 contains some of the most famous words in all of Scripture: “**The Lord is my shepherd**; I shall not want . . .” This image of God as a shepherd permeates the Hebrew scriptures. The children of Israel are referred to as sheep, meaning they are foolish, prone to wandering, in need of guidance, leading, and care. The imagery extends to the heroes of faith as well: Moses and King David are both literal shepherds before they are leaders of Israel.

So when we arrive at this text in John 10, where Jesus calls himself “the good shepherd,” we bring all the context from the Hebrew scriptures with us. Jesus is not simply making a shallow point about his care and compassion; he is making a prophetic declaration that he is in fact the Messiah but not the Messiah God’s people were expecting. Instead of coming with strength and power to fight a bloody revolution for the liberation of God’s people, Jesus comes like a shepherd who is willing to lay down his life for his sheep. He is once again working in ways they don’t expect for a kingdom that looks different from the one they think they want.

**Jesus is the Good Shepherd.** Ezekiel 34 is one example of a scriptural passage where God is described as a shepherd of the Israelite sheep. This passage references an era that is often called the “day of the Lord” a time when predators will no longer attack and the sheep (the Israelites) will be safe. The idea of the messiah as a shepherd would be familiar to those in the Jewish faith. King David was a shepherd as a young boy, in a family of shepherds. As king, he is also described as a shepherd of the Israelite people, which is why it makes sense for Jesus, who is in David’s family line, to claim this identity as well.

Because vocations were family-based; children engaged the same professions as their fathers, the lineage of King David is connected with shepherding. Multiple Old Testament scriptures, including many psalms, describe God as the ultimate good shepherd who cares for his sheep. When Jesus claims to be the Good Shepherd, he is blatantly identifying himself as the Messiah.

The Pharisees know their Scripture well, recognize Jesus’s references to Ezekiel right away, and are not thrilled by his claiming messiahship. Jesus equates his presence with the year (or day) of the Lord demonstrated in the ways he acts compassionately toward the poor, oppressed, and marginalized of both Jewish and Roman society.

**What’s the relationship between Sheep and Shepherds?** Sheep tend to wander. Psalm 23 references still water because sheep have been known to drink water with strong currents, and then they are swept away and drowned. Sheep can also get themselves trapped in hard-to-reach places, or areas where there are no food sources nearby. Sheep are vulnerable to predators. They don’t have claws, sharp teeth, or a way to camouflage themselves, so shepherds are the primary way that sheep stay safe.

Shepherding was not a highly favored job in the time of Jesus. The hours were long, not just during the day but also because shepherds had to sleep with their flocks overnight to protect them from nocturnal predators. Shepherds were criticized for being away from their families too much, leaving them vulnerable. Shepherds were often in danger themselves due to bad weather, predators, thieves, and having to range far from home in order to let the sheep graze.

Shepherds each had a unique call for their sheep. Different flocks of sheep often grazed together, so when it was time to separate, the shepherds relied on the sheep recognizing the sound of their voice as well as their unique call. The sheep would not follow unless they heard the call the call they knew from the voice they knew. This is why Jesus emphasizes that his sheep know him. He has a unique call to salvation, freedom, and inclusion in the kingdom of God. But he also has a unique voice—gentle, loving, compassionate. If Christ acts in the character of God and loves his sheep, then God’s people can be confident that those acting in ways counter to love and compassion are not acting on behalf of the Shepherd. When we see people claiming they care for sheep but acting in ways that are counter to the ways of the Shepherd, we know they are thieves or predators.

**Laying Down His Life.** Jesus’s love and compassion for his sheep go so far that, as the Good Shepherd, he lays down his life for the sheep. In Psalm 23, the shepherd is described as walking with the sheep through the valley of the shadow of death. In the parable of the lost sheep, Jesus declares that one lost sheep is more important to the shepherd than the ninety-nine who are not lost. In Jewish religious practice, sheep were also used for sacrifices an offering ritual meant to bestow forgiveness.

In a role reversal, Jesus says he as the shepherd is willing to take on the role of the sacrificed lamb in order to save the sheep. We often call Jesus the “Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” What does it mean for him to be a good shepherd who instead of having his life taken from him willingly lays down his life for the sheep?

Love, compassion, and incarnation are at the heart of Jesus’s message. God leaves power and might behind in order to unite with humanity in our full humanness. The kingdom of God is not about amassing power through violence but about gentle, loving kindness that sacrifices for others even though we still often look for or prefer the violence and power.

**Living the Way of the Good Shepherd.** If the way of the Good Shepherd is through the example of Jesus. We must travel through the gate of compassion, of love, of sacrifice, of laying down power. Then, anything that doesn’t embody those things is not of the Good Shepherd.

The safety and well-being of the sheep matter to God. We often think this is just a spiritual word, but there is real, physical care implied in the caring of sheep, which are fed, loved, protected. We are embodied spirits, so we fully matter, body and spirit, to the Good Shepherd.

As the sheep who follow the voice of Christ, we should recognize and care about those being torn apart by others. The kingdom of God operates differently than the kingdoms of the world. Where the world says to amass wealth and power, the kingdom of God says to lay those things down and follow Jesus to the cross. If we follow the voice of the Good Shepherd, what is that voice calling us to do? Christ might be calling us in this season of Lent *away* from habits, places, or things that keep us separated from God. We are called *toward* life abundant, grace, and mercy.

We are also called to embody the self-giving love of Christ, who willingly laid down his life for his sheep. Where can we lay down our lives for those around us? Sometimes this call has been literal for the people of God. Many faithful Christ followers have lost their earthly lives as a result of following the call of Jesus. Other times, we are called to give up certain powers or privileges out of love for others.

When we embody Christ’s sacrificial laying down of his life, we join in the glory of the resurrection When we embody Christ’s sacrifice in the world, others experience the resurrection power of Christ too, which can change entire communities.

Lent is a season of sacrifice. During Lent we give up or sacrifice in order to become more focused on our relationship with the Lord. We practice the spiritual disciplines more intentionally.

We lay down some things in order to pick up other things. We lay down the things of the world in order to connect with God in more life-giving ways. We see in this image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd a God who gave up everything in order to love us well.

So we respond to the voice of the Good Shepherd by doing likewise; laying aside our power, lay aside our privilege, lay aside our lives to follow after him, embrace others in love, and ultimately see the power of the resurrection permeate this world.