Throughout the Gospel of John, the gospel writer used a series of “I AM” statements to describe not only who Jesus is, but how he may relate to all of us. Statement such as I AM the ***“Son of Man”, “Bread of life”, “Light of the world”, “Gate for the sheep”, the “Good Shepherd”, the “Resurrection and the Life”, “the Way, the Truth and the Life”, and the “True Vine”*** affirmed the overall message that Jesus was indeed the multi-faceted Messiah who was sent to all of God’s people.

In the passage that we read earlier, Jesus was described as the ***“Good Shepherd”***[[1]](#footnote-1) and the ***“Gate for the sheep”***[[2]](#footnote-2). This keeps in line with the theme that we were talking about last week when the risen Christ appeared before the disciples and reminded them to fulfill their calling and their mission to ***“Tend My Lamb”*** and to ***“Feed My Sheep***”.

The image of the sheep and the shepherd may be somewhat difficult for many of us to relate to today, especially for those of us (myself included) who grew up in the urban settings. How often do we come face face-to-face with a flock of sheep? I know I don’t. The closest might be at the petty zoo and that’s about it. What do we know about being sheep and being a shepherd? Not very much unfortunately!

Incidentally a couple of my friends have recently returned from their recent trip to Scotland to explore the historic Presbyterian heritage. In addition to visiting some of the religious sites, they also visited the farm and came face-to-face with Scotland’s iconic sheep and the sheep meadow, as you see here in this photo. Even though my two friends are from rural Virginia and Illinois, it was still quite an encounter to be holding a sheep in your hand to imagine what it’s like being a shepherd watching over his flock.

As you know, the sheep are one of the dumbest and most gullible animals on earth. They would go wherever they were guided (or mis-guided). They are docile and obedient to their shepherd and follow to the command of the shepherds’ voice. There is an intimate bonding and mutual trust developed between the sheep and the shepherd.

The image of the shepherd is metaphorical to our role as the called disciples of Jesus, who is the Great Shepherd. When Jesus said, ***“My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.”*** He was stating more than the obvious. He pretty much summed up our relationship with him…like the sheep and the shepherd. As the sheep, we would only listen to and follow the voice of the shepherd. There’s this intimacy and bonding between the sheep and the shepherd…like no others. The shepherd knows his sheep and they followed him…like an infant who knows the voice of her parents.

The shepherd knows the sheep’s individual personalities, their behaviors and habits (whether they are good or bad), their daily physical needs…(food, water, shelter) or their safety and well-beings. Very much like a parent who would care for his or her children. In return, the sheep would comfortably lay out their trust upon the shepherd knowing that no matter what, their needs will be met. They would only listen to the voice of the shepherd and no one else. And that’s important!!!

But the role that we are being called is reciprocal. **Not only are we being referred to as the sheep who would obediently follow the command of the shepherd, but we are also called to be shepherd for other sheep as well.** The shepherd is delegated with the responsibility to lead and to protect those who are under his/her leadership. The shepherd must be willing lay down himself and herself for the sake of the welfare of the rest of the sheep under his or her watch.

Our passage this morning reminds us that a good shepherd would lead by example through his or her compassion and love for others. The shepherd gives more than what he or she receives and is not motivated by personal gains while placing the interests of the sheep first before himself or herself.

Furthermore, Jesus referred that the shepherd knows his sheep and calls them by their names. **When someone calls you out by your name, how do you feel? It instantly connects the caller with the ones who are being called in a much deeper and personal level.** It means that **you are important. Your opinion matters. Your feeling matters and you deserve my full undivided attention.** That’s the kind of relationship that is being established between the shepherd and the sheep and likewise between God and humanity.

Through this metaphoric relationship, Jesus reminded us that no matter what life brings or what trials that we might face, we are never too far away from the command and the sight of the Great Shepherd, who keeps watch over us. The Shepherd understands his sheep’s needs and the sheep trusted Him and recognized His voice (and His voice only).

More importantly, as we read in Psalm 23, **we come to discover who we are as God’s sheep, in light of who God is as the Great Shepherd.** But what I would like for us to meditate on this morning is the followings: ***“What does it mean for Jesus to be the Great Shepherd in our lives? How have we, like the sheep, unconditionally surrendered ourselves to the leading of the Shepherd?***

***How do we recognize the Shepherd’s voice in the midst of the many competing voices in our world today?”***

These are all valid questions that we must ask of ourselves.

Even at times when our relationship with God may seem a bit distanced off, when we may have ventured off on our own…away from the rest of the flock, God stays with us and keeps his close eyes upon us. As Jesus taught in his parable of the lost sheep, God is willing to put everything on the line in order to find the one lost sheep. Keep in mind that this does not mean that one lost sheep is greater than the other 99 who were obedient. What it does mean is that every single sheep is important and every life is valued and treasured. God is willing to surrender all for our sake, as he demonstrated through Christ.

The Shepherd knows where we are and he will bring us back to the sheep pen under this care and nurture us under His wings. The shepherd loves us and embraces us especially during times of despair and hopelessness.

A couple of years ago on the week right before Mother’s Day, one of my friends lost her 30-year old daughter tragically due to cancer to the brain. As you would imagine, my friend was devastated by the loss of her daughter. No parents would like to say “good-bye” to their own children. At first, I thought my friend’s daughter’s condition was managed and was receiving the proper medical treatment and care that she needed. And she was. Unfortunately something went terribly wrong. Things dramatically turned for the worse the week before Mother’s Day and the doctor’s prognosis was NOT optimistic at all. The daughter was put on a medically induced coma and was placed under hospice care. Meantime all my friend could do was to watch vigilantly at her daughter’s bedside 24/7. She had no idea how much longer she would have with her daughter. All she knew that she would be there with her till the end. By the grace of God, the daughter only stayed in the hospice care for a few short hours before she entered into eternal life with God.

Both my friend and her husband wished they would have her for a few more weeks or even months, but unfortunately that was not the time table that God had in mind. My friend’s daughter died a few days before Mother’s Day. My friend’s Mother’s day would never be the same going forward. It was never easy to lose someone whom you love so dearly, especially your own child. In the midst of all of this, my friend shared with us her source of strength, peace, and comfort. And it came through Psalm 23. ***The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.***

***2 He makes me lie down in green pastures;***

***he leads me beside still waters; 3 he restores my soul.***

***He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.***

***4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil;***

***for you are with me; your rod and your staff-- they comfort me.***

***5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;***

***you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.***

***6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.***

Our Father knows how painful it must be for us to endure such agony and pain because God himself also lost His only beloved child…He too was gone too soon (only 33) and had to endure through such tragic and untimely death. But this was all part of God’s timely plan for humanity.

Like a mother who will not forsake her nursing child or a Shepherd who will not give up in search for the lost sheep, God will never abandon God’s people in the midst tragedy and sorrow either. The Great Shepherd will continue to tend and feed His sheep, as we are commanded to do likewise to other sheep who have been assigned to us to keep watch. The Holy Spirit will continue to pray and intercede for us and heal us from our broken hearts, deep griefs, and despairs. No matter what our future may hold, God’s hand remains firmly in control, holding us and embracing us. For nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.[[3]](#footnote-3)

May we seek the true voice of the Shepherd and be attentive to the vision that the Great Shepherd has set before us in the light of hope and peace in this world. May we be inspired to share God’s love through mutual encouragement and strength, so that together, we may overcome the forces of evils that may lead us astray from the Good shepherd.

Friends, the Great Shepherd has called us with His own voice and has given us the peace that surpasses all of our human understanding***.***  ***“My sheep hear my voice.”*** He said, ***“I know them, and they follow me.”[[4]](#footnote-4)***Christ has promised to remain with us as the good shepherd even to the end of time, so that we may be confident that we belong - NOT to the powers of evil, sin, and death, but to him of whom we can declare with confidence and trust: ***“The Lord is my Shepherd.”***[[5]](#footnote-5)

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *John 10:11* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *John 10:7* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Romans 8:39* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *John 10:27* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Roger, John B. *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 2,* P.436 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)