WEEK #4
Bible Study

Full Scripture

John 10:11-16 (NRSV)

...THERE WILL BE ONE FLOCK, ONE SHEPHERD...

11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. 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.

Key Verse

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. John 10:16 (NRSV)

Key Concept

The identity of the community of faith, and of each individual who comprises it, is defined by its/his/her relationship with Jesus. There are many and diverse “folds,” but there is only one “flock,” united by loyalty to Jesus, who expresses God’s love and care for God’s “sheep” by his death and resurrection.

Gathering Prayer

Lord Jesus, in these moments and in every moment open our ears to hear your voice, so that we might live according to the words you have spoken. Thank you for your complete care, selfless love, and unconditional acceptance. In response and with gratitude, we follow where you lead. Amen.
Overview

This passage is part of the larger “Shepherd Discourse,” in which Jesus addresses the Pharisees, who have just driven out of the synagogue a blind man whom Jesus had healed (John 9:34). Pastoral imagery is common in Jewish tradition, and the Pharisees would have understood themselves to be the “shepherds” of the Jewish people. Jesus casts them in the role of “thieves,” “bandits,” and “hired hands” (John 10:8, 12), because they have “taken” the relationship between God and Israel as their exclusive privilege and worked to protect their own position and interests. They are like the “bad shepherds” of Ezekiel 34:1-10.

In contrast Jesus is the Good Shepherd, as God is portrayed in Ezekiel 34:11. The Good Shepherd cares so much for the sheep that he is willing to lay down his life for them (John 10:11). This selfless attitude is based on his relationship with both the sheep and the Father (John 10:14-15). To “know” is to be in a close, intimate, loving relationship. Jesus' love for God results in love for humanity, as our love for Jesus should result in love for others.

Unlike the Pharisees who excluded the healed blind man from the community of faith, Jesus welcomes him (John 9:35-38), and in fact opens the gate (see John 10:9) to all. Verse 16 indicates that the “flock” extends beyond the “fold” of Israel. In other words, the relationship between God and humanity is not the exclusive privilege of one people, but the inclusive invitation to all. Inclusion in the community of faith is not based on heritage, race, nationality, gender, denomination, worship style, or any other label or characteristic. Inclusion in the community of faith is based on relationship with Jesus.

Discussion Questions:

1. The primary distinction between the “hired hand” and the “good shepherd” is the selfishness of the former and the selflessness of the latter.
   a. In what ways are churches and individuals more self-focused than other-focused?
   b. What does it mean, or what might it look like, to “lay down our life” (to put aside our own desires, to give up time, to expend energy, to change priorities, etc.) for the benefit of others?
      i. How are we already doing this, and how could we do better?
   c. How is our relationship with Jesus reflected in our relationship with others?

2. The “Shepherd Discourse” arises out of a discussion about blindness (see John 9:35-41), and in the discourse Jesus emphasizes that the sheep recognize his voice (John 10:3-5, 16), an experience different from sight.
   a. How might we better recognize Jesus in others if we listened with our heart instead of judging by our sight?
   b. What are some of the prejudices or triggers that immediately throw up barriers (such as race, political party, gender identity, education level, immigrant status, etc.), and how might we “listen” in other ways to move beyond those barriers and “see” the person behind them as a child of God?
   c. What does it mean to listen to Jesus' voice (John 10:16)?
   d. How do Jesus' words in John 10:16 relate to his words in Matthew 12:50?
If listening to Jesus’ voice is the sign of inclusion in the “flock” (*John 10:16*), what does that tell us about what is/are NOT sign(s) of inclusion?

3. Take a look at some of the pastoral imagery in the Hebrew Bible: *Ezekiel 34; Psalms 23:1, 74:1, 79:13, 80:1, 95:7, 100:3.*
   a. Where do you hear the tradition of the Hebrew Scriptures coming through in Jesus’ words in *John 10*?
   b. Where do you hear Jesus moving beyond the tradition and reinterpreting it?

4. Discuss the following quote and how it sounds to “our world.” What people groups could we substitute for “the Gentiles”? How does thinking about others (whether enemies, unknowns, or disagreeables) as those “not yet brought into the sheepfold” change our perspective/attitude toward them?
   a. The original “sheep” are the people of Israel. Jesus is calling them, and those from among his Jewish contemporaries who are ready for the call are hearing his voice, trusting him and coming to him. But, as Israel’s prophets and wise writers had always hinted, the God of Israel was never interested only in Israel. His call to Israel was for the sake of the whole world. The “other sheep” are that great company, from every nation under heaven that God intends to save, and to save through Jesus. The Jewish Messiah is to become the Lord, the shepherd, of the whole world...The Gentiles are no longer the enemy. They are sheep who have not yet been brought into the sheepfold. Take a moment to think through how this announcement must have sounded in a world – Jesus’ own world – filled with hatred and suspicion, with violence and counter-violence. (*N. T. Wright, John for Everyone, Part One, Chapters 1-10. Westminster John Knox Press, © 2002, 2004, pp. 152-153*)

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**Sending Forth**

God of love, wisdom, power and might,  
Guide us, we pray:  
as we encounter the stranger,  
as we encounter those considered lesser than.  
Help us to represent you as we assist with a helping hand.  
In your name we pray,  
Amen.

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*Author: Rev. Casey Wilson, West Ohio Conference of The United Methodist Church*