Worship & Preaching Helps

WEEK #4

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.

Liturgies and Prayers

CALL TO WORSHIP – PSALM 100 (NRSV)

Leader: Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing.
People: Know that the Lord is God. It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Leader: Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name.

People: For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

STATEMENT OF FAITH

I believe I need a shepherd.
Because I am sometimes timid and other times overconfident,
because I often don’t know the best path yet pretend I do,
because I rush into dead ends or lead others into hazardous places,
because my brightest ideas are seamed with darkness,
because the things I crave may not be what are good for me,
I need a shepherd.

I believe in Jesus, the best possible shepherd;
his wisdom leads me to the best opportunities,
his word comforts me when I’m anxious or afraid,
his arm steadies me when I feel weary and heavy-laden,
his wounded body displays the cost of my rescue.

I believe in Jesus, the best possible shepherd.
I believe that I am under his care by virtue of sheer grace,
that the love he gives me is to be shared with others,
that he treasures my name and prepares a place for me,
that his flock transcends earth and heaven.

I trust Jesus, the Good Shepherd. Amen.


PRAYER OF CONFESSION

We grumble and complain about our daily lot in life. We read the newspapers, watch the broadcast news and moan about the evil that flourishes in the world. And we wonder, “Where are you, O God?”

We turn our backs on the needs of the poor or give only a cursory acknowledgment of their plight. We throw our hands up in the air and act as though we are defeated. And we cry, “Why isn’t God taking care of all this?”

Forgive us, patient Lord. Forgive our arrogance, our ignorance, our pettiness. Forgive us when we could have done something to help someone else, but chose instead to turn away. Forgive us when we, by our attitudes and language, our thoughts and actions, have gone against your will.

You are with us, Lord. You lead us daily in right paths and offer to us the bread of life. You stand with us in times of trial and in the presence of those whom we fear, giving us your abundant love.
And then you offer to us a place in your eternal home. How can we doubt your presence?

Help us to trust you. Help us to praise you and remember that you have called us to be your witnesses and workers in this world. Give us strength and courage, joy and peace for all the work that you have for us to do. In the name of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, who laid down his life for us, his sheep, we pray. AMEN.


WORDS OF ASSURANCE

In the midst of all that you fear, God is with you. God will not abandon you. Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, laid down his life for you and offers you hope and peace. AMEN.


BENEDICTION

With courage and humility follow Jesus, wherever he might lead.
With confidence and trust hold the hand of the Shepherd who holds you.
With joy and patience embrace the sheep for whom Christ laid down his life,
And remember that you are one of them. Amen.

Sermon Helps

THEME

The relationship between God and humanity is not the exclusive privilege of one people, but the inclusive invitation to all. This invitation is extended supremely in the death and resurrection of Jesus, and inclusion in the community of faith is based on relationship with him, evidenced by “knowing” (John 10:14) and “listening” (John 10:16).

EXEGETICAL & HERMENEUTICAL POINTS

The connection with John 9 helps to bring Jesus’ words out of the “pasture” and into the community of faith. Whereas the Pharisees excluded the healed blind man from the faith community (John 9:34), Jesus welcomes him (John 9:35-38) and then opens the “gate” (see John 10:9) wide for all who will enter.

The connection with John 9 also helps us recognize the power of both Jesus’ actions (chapter 9) and his words (chapter 10).

The primary difference between the “hired hand” and the “good/true shepherd” is where their interest lies – in self or in others. The “hired hand” is focused on himself and his own best interest. When things get difficult or dangerous, he tends to his own needs. The “good shepherd” is focused on his “sheep” and their best interest. When difficulty or danger comes, he is willing to lay down his life for the needs of the sheep. It’s the difference between one who was “hired to do a job” and The One who was “born to do this job.”

Certainly there is connection and consistency between Jesus’ words and pastoral imagery in the Hebrew Bible. It seems that the most direct connection with the “Shepherd Discourse” is Ezekiel 34. By drawing on that description
of God as the Good/True Shepherd and applying it to himself, Jesus affirms that he is doing the work of God, and in fact fulfills the law and the prophets (see Matthew 5:17).

It’s a small point, but interesting that the Gospel writer refers to “the” sheep, not “his” sheep. It’s a subtle way to point to the inclusivity of the “flock,” much like “God so loved the world…” (John 3:16).

Verse 16 indicates that the “flock” extends beyond the “fold” of Israel. Inclusion in the community of faith is not based on heritage (or race, nationality, gender, denomination, worship style, or any other label or characteristic), but on relationship with Jesus.

Verses 14-15 highlight the fact that the Shepherd is not only connected with the sheep, but also with the Father. It’s the connection with the Father that makes him “good” (also meaning “model,” “true,” and “winsome”). The mutual “knowing”/relationship between Jesus and humanity is a reflection of the mutual “knowing”/relationship between Jesus and the Father.

Notice also that Jesus’ willingness to lay down his life (verse 15) is not only because of his love for the sheep, but also, and I would argue primarily, because of his love for the Father. Jesus’ sacrifice is not “all about us.” It’s all about his obedience to God.

Ultimately unity comes from listening to and obeying the Shepherd, not from the “fold” in which we take comfort.

POUNTS OF APPLICATION

The Pharisees would have expected to be cast as the “shepherds.” They knew the Law. They knew how to worship. They knew religion better than anybody. The problem was that they didn’t know Jesus. Their own self-assuredness blinded them to seeing (or hearing the voice of) God’s work unfolding before them. How often are we so sure about what we believe about God or how we practice our faith that we cannot perceive the work of God right in front of us? What are our preconceived notions about who God is and how God works? Can we even identify them? Are we threatened when someone else does? Whom do we exclude from the community of faith because of our “blindness”?

If Jesus’ relationship with us flows out of his relationship with God, then as Jesus’ disciples, our relationships with others should flow out of our relationship with Jesus. Therefore the relationships should have similar characteristics – respect, love, mutuality, forgiveness, grace, mercy, etc.

The phrase “to lay down my life” in verse 15 clearly refers to Jesus’ death on the cross. This becomes clearer in verses 17-18 (in which it is intentionally linked with resurrection). This sacrifice is the ultimate act of love for and obedience to God, who loved “the sheep” and “the world” (John 3:16) so much, that God sent the Son, so that the sheep/world would know Life (see John 3:17 and 10:10). Later in the Farewell Discourse, Jesus says to his disciples, “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:13). In extreme cases this could mean dying for another, but I think it is more practical than that. Every day there are ways that we can “lay down” or “set aside” our life – our time, energy, priorities, desires, self-interest – to show love to another. Specifically thinking about race and inclusion – if Christ laid down his life for us, is it so much to ask that we set aside our prejudices and fears in order to show love to others?
In order to hear the Shepherd’s voice, we must listen. What are some ways that we do that effectively? What are the distractions that deter us? How can we hear his voice from unexpected sources, especially those that challenge our comfort or our assumptions?

The suggestion that there were “other sheep that do not belong to this fold” could have been understood (and was by some) as a threat to Israel’s exclusive position as “God’s chosen.” However, it could also have served as a call to remember that their chosen-ness was not for exclusivity, but inclusivity. God’s call on Israel was to be a blessing to all the families of the earth (Genesis 12:3) and a light to the nations (Isaiah 42:6, 49:6). Including “other sheep” is not a threat to Israel’s blessedness, but an expression of its calling to be a blessing. If we can help our congregations understand that inclusivity in the Church is not a threat, but a calling, then perhaps we might once again be the “light of the world” (Matthew 5:14).

PERSONAL ILLUSTRATION IDEAS

Think of a time when you were in a minority and how that made you feel, especially if you felt excluded. A couple of my own examples include traveling in Morocco and not speaking a word of Arabic and being the only male (as a chaperone) on a mission trip of all girls!

Tell about a time when someone “laid down their life” for you, the less dramatic the better, probably. I remember one morning when I discovered a flat tire on my car in the garage. It wasn’t an emergency, but I did need to take my student to school. Within ten minutes I had one member of my small group taking my student to school and another helping me change the tire. They selflessly set aside their own needs and time demands to help me. Why? Because of their love for and obedience to God. Oh sure, we’re friends, and we love each other, but that love is born out of deep love for God.

Is there an unexpected way that you’ve “heard” God’s voice? I heard it through a District Superintendent speaking at a Church Conference, of all places! As a teenager I had been to Christian music concerts, summer camps, worship services, and rallies, but it was at a Church Conference where God called me into set-apart ministry.

Creative Elements

HYMNS

- UMH #121 “There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy”
- UMH #128 “He Leadeth Me”
- UMH #136 “The Lord’s My Shepherd, I’ll Not Want”
- UMH #138 “The King of Love My Shepherd Is”
- UMH #174 “His Name Is Wonderful”
- UMH #347 “Spirit Song”
- UMH #381 “Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us”
- UMH #428 “For the Healing of the Nations”
- UMH #435 “O God of Every Nation”
- UMH #440 “Let There Be Light”
- UMH #518 “O Thou, in Whose Presence”
- UMH #648 “God the Spirit, Guide and Guardian”
- UMH #660 “God Is Here”
CONTEMPORARY MUSIC THEMES

▸ Shepherd
▸ Leading, guiding
▸ Listening, hearing, discerning
▸ Grace
▸ Invitation

IMAGES AND SYMBOLS:

▸ Sheep – different breeds together
▸ Shepherd’s staff, crook
▸ Green, pasture, grass
▸ Blue, quiet river/pond, water
▸ Globe, world map
▸ Photos of groups of people of different races, genders, nationalities, etc.

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