

The Shepherd and Flock: “And His Church”

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at Christchurcheastbay.org. Good morning. I'm Hannah Sue and I'm a member of the North Berkeley Community Group and volunteer with CC Kids.

A reading from the Gospel according to John. Very truly, I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate but climbs in by some other way is a thief and a robber.

The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger. In fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice.

[1 : 14] Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them. Therefore, Jesus said again, Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep.

All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved.

They will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away.

Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me.

[2 : 16] Just as the father knows me and I know the father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not part of this sheep pen. I must bring them also.

They too will listen to my voice and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my father loves me is that I lay down my life only to take it up again.

No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my father.

My sheep listen to my voice. I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand.

My father who has given them to me is greater than all. No one can snatch them out of my father's hand. I and the father are one. This is the gospel of the Lord.

[3 : 15] Praise to you, Lord Christ. Good morning, Christ Church. It's really good to be back for my trip. I was on an 11-day trip and got back late Thursday night, which means that you are probably more prepared for this sermon than I am.

But I very much enjoyed my pastor's retreat and connecting with family and friends. And then this past week I've been connecting at two different seminaries, recruiting potential people to come and serve with us here at Christ Church.

And it was great to be back in the place where I began training for ministry about 25 years ago. And just to think of God's faithfulness to me and to this church.

I would love for you to pray as we follow up with these potential ministry candidates in these coming weeks and months. But given the time change and seeing how well-rested you all look, we should just dive right in.

We are preparing for the 20th birthday of Christ Church. We're going to be celebrating that after Easter. And so we're renewing our mission as we come to that milestone.

[4 : 29] And it's so important when you sit down to hammer out the mission, vision, and values of a new organization or institution to adequately and clearly capture your core identity and purpose.

Who are we? Why do we exist? What are we here to do? And I remember when we were crafting the mission statement of Christ Church, we were not satisfied to simply say that we exist to lead people into a deeper relationship with Christ, period, full stop.

We were concerned at that time that in our individualistic culture, people might think that you could be connected to Christ apart from his church.

That the church could somehow be optional or irrelevant to having a deeper relationship with Christ. That people would say, well, I don't need the church.

I don't need other Christians. I can follow Jesus on my own. Or that someone might say to themselves, I don't know any, I don't really need to know anything about the Lord's work in his church over the past 2,000 years.

[5 : 46] I'll just set out on the Christian life and sort of make it up as I go along. And I've heard people actually say out loud, like, I love Jesus, but I'm not really sure about the church.

But Jesus says, the reason I came down from heaven to earth and the reason I laid down my life is because I love the church. And if you want a relationship with me, you've got to love what I love.

And so there are many metaphors in the Bible about the church. They're meant to spark our imagination about the relationship between Christ and the church. The vine and the branches, we heard about that last week.

There's the head and the body. There's the groom and the bride. The cornerstone and the temple. The shepherd and the flock of sheep and many, many others. Each of these are meant to bring out a different dimension of the union, the love, the commitment that Christ has for us, his church, and the identity and the mission that he wants his beloved church to live by.

And so today I want to invite us and challenge us to renew our commitment to Christ's church through this metaphor of the flock of sheep and the good shepherd. And Jesus gives us some critical elements for what it means to have a deeper relationship with Christ in the context of his church.

[7 : 13] And so I want to explore three aspects of this passage. First of all, the shepherd's presence with his flock. Secondly, the shepherd's costly love for his flock. And third, the shepherd's mission through his flock.

So the shepherd's presence with his flock, the shepherd's costly love for his flock, and the shepherd's mission through his flock. You guys awake?

All right, here we go. The shepherd's presence with his flock. Verse 2. Yeah, verse 2. Jesus says, The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice.

He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. The scene that Jesus depicts in this parable is basically a typical morning in a village in the ancient Near East where the shepherd shows up in person, and his first task is to call the sheep out of the sheepfold and into the street and through the village out into the green pastures.

And when the shepherd comes, he gives his own unique call, and out of like a hundred sheep, a little flock of about 20 or 30 sheep, they hear that unique call, and they respond to his voice.

[8 : 34] They respond to his calling. And the shepherd, of course, has a special attachment with his sheep. He loves these sheep, and so typically will give them an affectionate pet name like Shorttail or Bright Eye or Black Spot or Big Red.

It says in verse 3, They listen to his voice because he calls them by name, and he leads them out. And the sheep, you know, they line up and they file behind their shepherd to a new day that's full of lush grass and fresh air and shady trees and rests beside peaceful waters.

Now pause here to make an observation that the church is not merely a non-profit organization. The church is not merely a historic institution.

The church is not a voluntary community that's built on shared values and interests. The church is not a social club where people belong because they're part of the same class or the same race.

The church is not a social service provider that's dedicated to just and noble causes, primarily. Jesus is teaching us here that the church exists because of the incarnation.

[9 : 51] The church exists because of the person and the work and the presence of the shepherd. The flock is not self-generated. It exists only because the shepherd arrives on the scene in the flesh, and he comes in person, and he summons his flock into existence.

And he calls them out by the word of the gospel, and he herds his sheep and his flock to follow behind him. That's what the church is.

The church is a flock filled with people whom the good shepherd has called out by name. The Greek word for the church. Anytime you see the word church in the New Testament, it's this Greek word ekklesia.

Ekklesia means called out. The called out ones. The church is the people who've been called out from the darkness into the light. Called out from sin and death into righteousness and life.

Called out into the presence of our resurrected and living shepherd. That's what a church is. And Jesus says in verse 27, he says, My sheep listen to my voice.

[11 : 03] I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish. No one shall snatch them out of my hand. See, the church exists because of the shepherd's presence and the shepherd's initiative.

The true identity of the church is grounded in the fact that we are a flock that's known by the shepherd. He says, I know the ones that I've called out by name and they follow me.

They follow my leading. So that if any of you ever moves away from here, God forbid that any of you moves on from Berkeley.

But if you ever move away from here and you need to find a new church, the first thing you should ask yourself is not, How good is the music? How good is the kids program?

How good is the youth group? How good is the coffee? No, the first question you should ask yourself is, Is the shepherd here? Is the shepherd present here in this place and with these people?

[12 : 08] Is this flock aware that the shepherd is actually alive and in their midst? Do they know themselves? Are they living as people who've been called out by name?

Is this a church where they're following wherever the shepherd is leading them? That's how you know you're in a real church. And notice what happens when the shepherd comes to be present. Jesus says in verse 3 that he calls his own sheep by name and he leads them out. In verse 4 he says, When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.

But they will never follow a stranger. In fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice. So follow the parable. To get the flock out to the green pastures, the shepherd must first get through the chaos of the village.

Where the sheep are going to be encountering many other voices. The voices of strangers who are offering alternative paths to the sheep.

[13 : 18] And it's so tempting in the village for the sheep to just wander off after a dozen or more voices that are just calling loudly, calling persistently for their attention and for their loyalty.

Even though these strangers care nothing for the flock. It's as if Jesus knew that one day there would be podcasts. You know, that one day there was going to be Instagram and Substack and YouTube.

Alternative voices of strangers that are distracting and dividing and destroying the sheep. You see, when Jesus calls us sheep, he's actually not giving us the most flattering of descriptions.

Right? I so wish that Jesus said, you are stallions. Right? I mean, you are tigers. You're eagles. You're sharks. I mean, tough.

You're strong. But what is a sheep? A sheep is vulnerable. A sheep is weak. Sheep easily lose their sense of direction and they start to panic. If the sheep wander off by themselves, they're the most defenseless, most helpless, most pitiful of all the animals.

[14 : 37] If you go home today, sometimes I do this on a Sunday afternoon. I'll watch YouTube videos of sheep. And you'll see that they're constantly getting stuck in a ditch.

Or in a fence. Or in, I mean, my favorites, they get stuck in a tire swing. Swinging back and forth. They'll get stuck on their own backs and they need someone they literally cannot turn over to walk again.

They need somebody to come set them free. And why is Jesus insulting us by telling us that we're sheep? Because he wants to convince us, you need a shepherd. You need a good shepherd.

Notice that these strangers are not the only enemies of the flock. That Jesus mentions several others. He says there are also hired hands who care nothing for the sheep. And they won't protect the sheep from real danger.

He says that there's the thief who comes to steal and kill and destroy the sheep. He talks about the wolf who comes to snatch the sheep and just devour them for lunch. And what Jesus is telling us is that we are far more spiritually dependent.

[15 : 42] Far more spiritually vulnerable. Far more spiritually weak than we often realize. But sheep possess one remarkable quality. And that is that they can readily recognize and trust the specific voice of their shepherd over all the clamoring voices of strangers.

Jesus says this word five times in this passage. He says, listen, listen, listen, listen, listen. Listen. Listening is fundamental to the survival and the safety of the flock as it relies on the shepherd to guide them into green pastures and prevent us from wandering off and protecting us from all these dangerous enemies.

So let's pause here for some application. What does this mean for us? Jesus is teaching us that his church, his flock, is filled with people who are listening to his voice as a matter of survival.

The church listens to his voice through the reading and preaching of God's word on Sundays. The church listens to his voice in groups of eight to 12 people meeting weekly, opening the Bible to learn together.

The church listens to his voice daily in a time alone with God as he speaks to us in the scriptures and by his spirit. The health of our flock, the health of any church is measured in a large part by the way that we listen to the shepherd.

[17 : 04] So what is your daily predictable pattern and plan and place where you are listening to the voice of the shepherd? Any church, any flock that's worth being a part of is spending at least 10 to 20 minutes a day listening for the real, genuine, authentic, authoritative voice of its shepherd as he's speaking in the Bible.

And if you don't know where to begin, if you're new to this, typically I put people in the green pastures of Colossians 3, 1 to 17. And you say, why there?

Well, go read it and you'll know. And I say, read it daily, read it over and over until you basically have that memorized. Jesus is saying that you can tell a true flock that is centered on the authoritative presence of the incarnate and resurrected shepherd because he says, quote, they will never follow a stranger.

In fact, they will run away from a stranger's voice. And what he's saying there is that there's to be only one authoritative voice for his flock. So the question is, are you getting enough of the voice of your shepherd in your head and in your heart so that you can discern the voice of strangers who want to shepherd you not to green pastures?

They want to shepherd you to the slaughterhouse. Jesus says his church is filled with people who are listening to his voice in order that we might follow him where he leads.

[18 : 39] And what that means is that when we read the scriptures in which his voice is speaking, we are to also pray, Lord, show me where you're leading. Lord, give me faith to follow.

Give me obedience to follow. Give me courage to follow you. A deeper relationship with Christ and his church means that we are committing to live day by day as part of a flock that's listening to the authentic authoritative voice of the shepherd and prayerfully following him in obedience.

That's the kind of flock our good shepherd desires to lead. So we talked about the shepherd's presence with his flocks. I want to talk about the shepherd's costly love for his flock.

Look at verse 7. Therefore, Jesus said again, So in this shepherd, in this parable, the shepherd has led his flock out of the village and into the wilderness where the sheep are to spend their day just grazing and drinking and playing and resting.

And in the late summer and early fall, you come into a dry season, much like where we live. And you have to travel far to find green pasture.

[20 : 15] And so the shepherd will take his sheep out there and what he'll do is he'll build a little enclosure of field stones. And that enclosure will provide shelter and protection at night for the sheep.

But there's only one vulnerable spot. And that is when the sheep all come inside this enclosure, the one vulnerable spot is across the entrance.

And so that's where the shepherd will sleep across the threshold. He'll become the door. He'll become the gate to protect the sheep. You've got all these nervous sheep.

And they're out here in this boundless, howling wilderness. And there's all these lurking threats and dangers of thieves and wolves. And the shepherd says, No, I'm the gate. I'm here to keep you safe. I'm here to keep you secure. That's what a shepherd does. The enemy is wanting to steal and kill and destroy you. And left on your own, you guys are dead meat.

[21 : 18] But Jesus says, I'm the gate. I've come to defend and protect my flock so that it can go in and it can come out and it can be free and it can find pasture and sustenance.

And the result of that, Jesus says, is that my flock will have life to the full. My flock will have life in abundance. My flock is going to be given a generous measure of all that it needs.

And this brings us to the heart of Jesus' teaching that the shepherd is willing to die so that his flock will be alive with the eternal life of God himself.

The only reason Jesus can talk in verses 9 and 10 about his sheep being saved and about them having abundant life is because of his substitutionary and life-giving death.

And this is where he gets at it in verse 11. I'm the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away.

[22 : 22] Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away and because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep, he says, I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me just as the Father knows me and I know the Father.

And I lay down my life for the sheep. Now if you're Jewish and you hear Jesus say, I am the good shepherd, what do you immediately think of?

Psalm 23. Yahweh is my shepherd. Therefore, I lack nothing that I really need. And you remember that in Psalm 23, the shepherd Yahweh, he goes out into that dangerous wilderness.

He goes down into that valley that's dark and where there's death, where the big bad wolf lives. But because the shepherd is here with me, I will fear no evil because his rod and his staff, they comfort me.

So John 10 is Jesus' brilliant retelling of Psalm 23. And in fact, Jesus is doing way more than that. He's thinking of the prophets. And I'll just give you one example.

[23 : 31] This is a short snippet from the prophet Ezekiel chapter 34. Here's what it says. This is what the sovereign Lord says. I myself will search for my sheep.

I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak. I will save my flock and they will no longer be plundered. I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them. He will tend them and be their shepherd. I will make a covenant of peace with them and rid the land of savage beasts so that they may live in the wilderness and sleep in the forest in safety.

And no one will make them afraid. You are my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, and I am your God, declares the sovereign Lord. Jesus has Psalm 23 on his mind.

He has Ezekiel 34 on his mind. He knows the promises that God has made to rescue his sheep from danger, especially the ones that are afraid, the ones that are lost and strayed, the ones that are injured and weak.

[24 : 45] But Jesus also knows that this promised rescue operation will cost the shepherd dearly. And so in verse 11, he says, When the big bad wolf comes to attack the sheep individually and the flock collectively, a good shepherd will not run away like the hired hand who's just in it for short-term rewards.

Who feels no sense of ownership, no sense of responsibility for the sheep. The good shepherd, he says, will not abandon his sheep when the wolf attacks because he cares so much for his flock. And five times in this passage, Jesus talks about the shepherd laying down his life in costly love. He's saying that he will not only get hurt in the great battle with the wolf, but he will be killed, he says, for the sheep.

In place of the sheep, on behalf of the sheep, as a substitute for the sheep. So how much does a shepherd love his flock?

Jesus says in verse 15, And the ultimate demonstration of his love for his flock is that Jesus did not run away to save his own skin.

[26 : 13] But he willingly paid the price of the infinite preciousness of his life to rescue his flock. But Jesus wants to make two things crystal clear.

And here's what he says in verse 17. He says this, The reason my father loves me is that I lay down my life only to take it up again.

No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. And what Jesus is saying there is he says, first of all, The wolf is not going to take my life from me.

I'm not going to be a passive victim of the Roman Empire or the Israelite establishment. I'm not going to be crushed by the greatest government and the greatest religion that the world has ever seen.

No, Jesus is saying, I lay down my life of my own accord. I lay it down voluntarily. I lay it down authoritatively on my cross. And the second thing Jesus wants us to know is that laying down my life only has meaning if I take my life up again.

[27 : 23] The substitutionary death of the shepherd means nothing if the shepherd is still dead. What good is a dead shepherd? If the shepherd is still in his tomb, how could he call us by name?

How could he bring us out? How could he go ahead of us? How could he lead us to follow him? The only way that the shepherd can give us an eternal life that never perishes is if he has this life in himself.

It's only because Jesus physically, literally, historically was raised from the dead by his father. It's only because Jesus authoritatively took up his life again on Easter Sunday that Christianity makes any sense at all.

And so Jesus predicts his powerful resurrection when death will be swallowed up by life. And he affirms his victory over death before it ever even happens.

And by the way, we didn't print this part for you, but after Jesus says these things, it says his audience said, You're raving mad. You are demon-possessed.

[28 : 38] And they picked up stones to kill him. Pause for some more application. What does this mean for us? Well, first of all, Jesus is teaching us that the church, the flock that he loves so much, it's filled with people who delight themselves in the way in which he saves us, in the way in which he gives us abundant life.

And so the question for us is, are you living with the full weight of your trust on the costly, sacrificial, self-giving love that the shepherd has demonstrated for you on his cross?

Is that at the center? Is that at the core of your identity? And more than that, are you living as if Jesus was raised from the dead?

Are you living as if he actually won the victory for you already over your greatest enemies of sin, death, hell, and the devil? Because that's what he said he's come to do.

And are you living as if you have this new life, this abundant life, this eternal life that never perishes? Because Jesus is saying, this is the definition of my church.

[30 : 00] This is the definition of what it means to be part of my flock. Second application is that if our shepherd paid such a great price, if he came and he bore such a high cost of shedding his blood to do battle with this wolf, then his flock ought to be marked by a willingness to sacrifice.

His flock ought to be marked by a willingness to suffer in order that our lives might be conformed to the image of the good shepherd himself.

And what that means is that any patterns of our thought life, any habits of our speech, any routines of our conduct that are not worthy of our good shepherd, they have to go.

no matter what it costs you, no matter how much it hurts you, because the good shepherd wants his goodness to be seen in his sheep.

And so the question for us is, when people are looking at our lives, are they going to say, ah, there's a person who's been loved with a costly love?

[31 : 33] When people experience us, are they going to say, ah, I think I'm experiencing something of the goodness, of the good shepherd? So we've talked about the shepherd's presence with his flock, and the shepherd's costly love for his flock, and I want to close by talking about the shepherd's mission through his flock, and I'm sorry, this is a little longer than I wanted, but I wrote it on a plane on Thursday night, so bear with me.

Verse 16, Jesus says, I have other sheep that are not of this pen, the sheep pen, and I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.

The other sheep refers to the Gentiles. And the shepherd is saying here, he wants to lead his flock out beyond Israel into the wider world of all the nations, and he wants to enlarge his flock as big as it can possibly become.

He wants his flock to become considerably larger by bringing in a whole lot of very different sheep who can also come and belong to this shepherd-loved, shepherd-listening, shepherd-led flock. And what's interesting to me is when you read the New Testament, it's clear that Jesus' disciples, his apostles, understood this. The apostle Paul took the gospel way far away from his home to a city called Corinth in Greece.

[33 : 12] And we read about this in the Acts of the Apostles, Acts chapter 18, and Paul's there. This is a very difficult place to take the gospel. And Paul is needing some encouragement, and so it says that the Lord Jesus came to him in a dream.

He came in a vision, and he said to Paul, he said, I have many people in this city. It's the good shepherd coming to Paul and saying, I have many other sheep that I've sent you to find in this city. That's in the city of Corinth. And what's interesting is that in 1 Corinthians 9, Paul says this, he says, I made myself a slave to everyone to win as many sheep as possible.

He says, I became all things to all people so that I might save some. He knew what Jesus meant when Jesus said, I want other sheep to hear my voice too.

When Jesus said, I must bring my other sheep in, also Paul and all the other apostles, they got that. The first Christians, the early church, they were willing to go out. They were willing to lay down their lives in costly love in order to share with people the good news that you too can belong to a good shepherd.

[34 : 34] And what motivated them to share this news, Jesus tells us in verse 28, he says, I give them eternal life and they shall never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me is greater than all and no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.

This shepherd who gave his life for the sheep will see to it that every sheep for whom he bled and died will be safe and secure in his nail-scarred hands and in the omnipotent hands of his Father. You know, we live in a kind of scary world. We live in a world that's increasingly filled with fear. But the church is to be filled with people who are resting in the double grip of the Father and the Son. That we are to be a people who are resting in the security that we're safe in his hands forever. And that even in death we cannot ultimately be harmed because we're in this unbreakable bond of the union and the love that the Father and the Son share with each other.

And that these are the hands that are going to raise us up from the dead on the last day and we will never be separated from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. And that's good news.

[36 : 06] That's a good news that's worth sharing with other people. And Jesus is saying that he wants his church to be filled with people who share his heart for other sheep.

Sheep who are currently outside of the sheepfold. That they might come in and share our comfort. That they might share our security. That they might share the hope that we have.

That our past and our present and our future rests not in my hands. Rests not in your hands. Man, they rest in the hands of somebody who's trustworthy.

What will happen when these other sheep come in? Jesus says there will be one flock and one shepherd. Out of all the differing languages all the cultural boundaries all the unique foods all of our distinctive dress all of our particular styles of worship all of our social values all of our political emphases Jesus says there is going to be one worldwide flock under one authoritative shepherd. And friends in a world full of suspicion a world full of division a world full of conflict that's fueled by pride our shepherd wants us to be one flock under one authoritative shepherd.

[37 : 28] the bond of love that unites the father and the son the bond of love that unites the shepherd with his sheep that's the bond of love that's to unite us with each other.

And so I want to invite you to join me as we renew our love for the flock that our good shepherd loves so much that we might pray for the mission of the church and that we might pray more earnestly for the unity of the church that through us many more people many other sheep might enter into the security that we enjoy of resting in the strong hands of the father and the son by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen? In the name of the father son and Holy Spirit Amen.