

Mondovi: Our Savior's & Gilmanton United Methodist Churches
4.21. 2024, 4th Sunday of Easter, Rev. Hyuntae Kim, Ph.D.

“Mutual Knowledge and Love between the Shepherd and the Sheep”

John 10:11-18

Let us pray: *Jesus, Good Shepherd, we are sheep with poor eyesight, but we want to perk up our ears to hear your voice. Lead us to hear your loving voice through your Word today. As we enter and go out through the door of your Word today, feed us abundantly with your life-giving food. In your good name. Amen.*

How do you build a friendship with someone? It depends on the quality and quantity of time spent together. For me, the memories I have of fun eating and talking with my brothers and sisters make me feel close to them to this day. Likewise, in our relationship with Jesus, the quality and quantity of time we spend with Him will determine our intimacy with Him.

Today we will reflect on our intimate relationship with Jesus the Good Shepherd. First, we need to see the context in which Jesus is speaking today. Jesus heals a man who has been blind since day one, but the Pharisees do not believe him to be the Messiah. Jesus later meets and talks with the healed man. The man believes that Jesus, the Son of Man, is the Messiah and worships him. He worships God in human form. Jesus says, “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind” (John 9:39). Some Pharisees who were with him ask, “What? Are we blind, too?” Jesus says to them, “If you were blind, you would have no sin, but now you say, ‘We see.’ Therefore your sin remains” (John 9:41). After that, to address it further, he tells the Parable of the Sheep and the Good Shepherd in chapter 10.

What is the sin that Jesus is talking about? That's saying they see although they don't see. What do they not see? That God the Son, the representative of the Trinity, has come visibly to enter into an intimate relationship with people and is standing right in front of them, and they don't see it. In other words, being out of the relationship with God is sin. Sin is a state of spiritual blindness. Jesus says this here to reveal the Pharisees' blindness and to enlighten our blindness today to bring us into a relationship with Him.

A typical animal with poor eyesight is a sheep. They can't see very far away, so they only see the sheep's tail in front of them and follow them. If the sheep ahead of them fall off a cliff, they fall with them. They don't have any weapons or strength to fight. If they fall, they can't get back up. Without a shepherd, they can't survive; but there's one thing they're good at. That's listening. So, they can hear the voice of the shepherd and follow him. However, if they don't listen to the voice but just follow what they can see, they will end up being lost sheep.

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There are two main pillars of faith that we as sheep should have. The first and most important pillar is to know and love God. In the Old Testament, God used sacrifices to restore a relationship with his people, but Israel lost the original spirit of the sacrifices, which was fellowship with God. They became a formality. So God said in Hosea 6:6, "I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings." He was tired of sacrifices as mere formality. What God desires is not sacrifice, but rather that we love and know Him steadfastly.

The other pillar of faith is to listen and obey. In the book of 1 Samuel, King Saul continued to disobey the LORD's word. When the prophet Samuel came late, Saul held the sacrifices himself, and he didn't obey God's command to destroy the Amalekites, even their livestock, but instead claimed to have left sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the LORD. Samuel said to him, "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams" (1 Samuel 15:22).

The classic metaphor for the first pillar, knowing and loving God, is the bride and the groom. In the book of Hosea, God, the groom, says to Israel, the bride, "You don't know my heart," and he says, "I'll pay the price and bring you back." The prophet Hosea's wife has gone off with another man, but he pays the price and brings her back. That price is later represented by the love of Jesus on the cross. "Do you know how much I love you? Even if you leave me, I'll bring you back." That's the love of God.

What's the other pillar of faith?: listening and obeying. If we don't hear God's voice, we're not really practicing our faith. How do we hear God's voice? We can hear it in our heart, in our spirit, through the Word, not with our physical ears. When we hear or read the Word, whether it's through a sermon or a Bible reading, the Word has to be heard in our heart and spirit. If we hear and read the Word but don't understand what it means and it doesn't resonate with us, we cannot live our faith accordingly. It's because, through listening, we can have a relationship with God. To build a relationship with someone, it's crucial to listen well. It's not just about speaking my own words. Faith is also a relationship, like the relationship between parents and children, between friends, or between a shepherd and sheep.

These two pillars of faith are interconnected. When we know and love God, we hear God's voice better. When we are born as a baby to our parents, relate to them, get to know them, and love them, we can hear their love in their nagging. Likewise, when we know and love God, we can listen to His voice voluntarily with real freedom. In other religions in the world, they want to know a deity because they need to satisfy what their gods want and get what

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they want from them. So they don't truly love their gods. It's not a person-to-person relationship. What about us? We want to know and wholeheartedly love God more.

Jesus is the one who perfected this. In John 14:31, Jesus says, "... I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father." Jesus did just two things: love the Father and do what the Father has commanded. Jesus showed us, first, how much love we can live out in a father-child relationship, and second, what it means to hear the Father's voice and obey His will. Jesus came as the Spirit in us to complete these two things within us.

In verse 14 of today's passage, Jesus used the word "know" twice. In the order of knowing, the shepherd knows the sheep first. When we were born as babies, did we recognize our parents? No, our parents knew us first. Just as our parents knew us and loved us first, leading to a parent-child relationship, so the Lord knows us and loves us first, leading us into a relationship of knowing Him.

In the next verse, Jesus says something truly remarkable. He is saying that the Lord, our Shepherd, and we, His sheep, know each other, just as the Father knows the Son and the Son knows the Father. How is this possible between the Lord and us, since the Father and the Son, along with the Holy Spirit, are a three-in-one being, living in perfect unity and loving fellowship without the slightest rift? It is because we are invited into the person of Jesus, true God and true man, that we can enter into the union of the Father and the Son in him through his Spirit.

In that relationship, we are loved so much that we love Him back, which results in voluntary service. Anything that is not voluntary becomes religion, a formalized offering that God hates. When children are disciplined while being fully loved by their parents, they too will voluntarily obey out of love.

If you're wondering if you're one of the sheep not in the fold, don't worry. In verse 16, Jesus says, "I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd." Even if we don't listen to Jesus but follow what we see and get lost, He will find us. No matter in what circumstances we are found by Him and brought back into the fold, we are one flock with only one Shepherd, our Lord. The pastor is a little shepherd, but in a way he or she is a sheepdog, driving the sheep behind them to keep them on track and barking at stray sheep to warn them to follow the shepherd.

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Jesus loves us so much that He lays down His life for us. In verse 18, Jesus says, "No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily." He can do this because He is a God who has "the authority to lay it down when [He] want[s] to and also to take it up again." We see that Jesus' laying down His life is a voluntary act of obedience out of love for the Father. In verse 17, Jesus says, "I sacrifice my life so I may take it back again." When he lays down his physical life, he puts to death the old man who belongs to our old creation so that, when he takes it up again, he may give us a new life that belongs to the new creation. That is "the reason my Father loves me," he says. God the Son was already loved by the Father in heaven, but when he came as the Son of Man and did the Father's will, he was also loved by the Father as the Son of Man. When our children voluntarily help with household chores or work hard to accomplish something, isn't it even more endearing while we always love them?

When Jesus concludes his discourse by showing his closeness to the Father by saying, "This command I received from my Father" (v. 18b), what happens? What he has said causes a dispute among the Jews. Many of them say, "He's demon-possessed and out of his mind." How did Jesus' words sound to you? If words that bring one closer to God sound like demon-possessed, then they are following the voice of the devil, who is preventing them from hearing the voice of God. We need to hear this word in our hearts, so that we can be followers of the Shepherd.

In a video, I saw an elderly woman with dementia remembering Jesus even though she couldn't remember her family members. There are many examples of people with significant memory loss remembering the Lord's Prayer and hymns they learned as children, even though they forget everything else. While it would be best if we never get dementia, we should spend as much time with Jesus while we are younger so that we don't miss His voice later in life. Even if dementia comes and we forget His name, Jesus our Good Shepherd will still love us and lead us to the Father. Amen.

Friends, before I end my sermon with a prayer, let's take a moment and close our eyes to say to Jesus, "I love you, Lord."

Let us pray: Lord, who knew us before we knew you, we thank you for your unyielding love and for inviting us into the wonderful fellowship of union with the Father. On your faithful character, we rely at all times and in all circumstances. Through receiving your love, may we willingly fulfill the Father's will in this world, so that even those outside of the sheep pen may come to know this wonderful God through us. Through our Lord Christ Jesus. Amen.