

Sunday, April 30, 2023 *“Jesus the Good Shepherd”*

Acts 2: 42-47 | Peter 2:19-25 | John 10:1-18

The other day I was at a gathering and saw an individual I had not seen for a few years; I knew her family and connections. She knew me right away and asked about my family. But her name was just not there. Has this happened to you? Where you have just drawn a blank with a person's name? Eventually as we continued to talk I remembered her name and even more connections! That leads me to ask you this- How well do you know each other as a church family? How well do others know you?

This is a difficult task because some people present have been here for many years; others only a few weeks. Some have come only a few times and for some, the times that were missed were only during the pandemic when we could not gather here. But if I were to ask you some questions about people would you be able to answer? Who amongst you are or were nurses? What about teachers or professors? What about people who worked for an auto or manufacturing company of auto parts in some form or connection or utility or phone companies? Who amongst you are farmers or were raised on a farm? Who are accountants or play music as a past-time? Who have lived in Windsor for many years or have moved back or to this area after several years elsewhere?

What about family connections? Do you know each other's families even a little? Maybe you might know about children/ grandchildren- or parents a little bit? But this is a good one— what kind of vehicles do you each drive? Many people have red vehicles of some sort here- but what about all the blue, black, grey and white ones! Maybe you know the names of each other's pets? Names like Rose, Maisy, Pebbles, Max? All these questions are the ways in which we can find out about each other and who we are as individuals. But what happens is we just say hi and how about those Maple Leafs? And we don't really 'know' each other.

The purpose of these questions is to see if you know each other and how important it is to know each other as part of this church family and in the wider perspective, who we are as people connected to each other through faith and love. Today we welcome Diana and Enhao and little David into God's family. They may not know you well, yet; but God knows them just

like God knows you. We wear name tags to help us to get to know each other. Yet God knows us through and through because He created you and you have experienced His presence in some way so much that you have been moved to act and respond. You are here to worship and praise God for His many blessings because this is your church family and what is important is that you are loved with the love of God given through Jesus Christ and it is the Spirit that enables us to do this freely.

The passage shared from John 10 took place in the time when Jesus was teaching anyone who would listen including people who were unsure of who he was. The Pharisees and synagogue leaders were not sure what to make of this teacher who had healed a blind man and was teaching with the authority of God. Some said that he had a demon—a phrase often used when people could not explain what was happening. They were not sure what was going to happen but they could see that his followers were growing in number. This made them uncomfortable with what might occur down the road in time.

Jesus said, I am the good shepherd and I know my sheep. When the people heard Jesus say this they knew what he meant. Farmers who owned and raised sheep valued their flock and hired people upon whom they could depend to keep them safe. Not only were sheep raised for wool and eventually robes and blankets, they were also a source of food. Sheep were cared for and they knew them from the moment they were born. But for us- living in 21st century in a city where seeing a live sheep is rare we might wonder why did Jesus call himself Shepherd; a good Shepherd?

Jesus explains how shepherds worked caring for the sheep entrusted to them. The shepherd has the well-being of the sheep at heart, rather than his own well-being. This shepherd enters rightly, properly, and openly into the sheepfold as this is where the sheep would often rest at night. If there was no actual gate, the shepherd would position themselves to act as the gate. This would prevent would be thieves from going in/or out with a sheep. The shepherd would also know each animal and their traits as well- because they had raised them from lambs. They would know him as well- he would call to them and they would answer and follow. There is a relationship of trust present. They hear and follow the shepherd then they

trust the shepherd to lead them out and he goes before them, in front of them to lead. They are not abandoned.

This self- description of Jesus as Good Shepherd reminds us of our role in faith filled and right living. Jesus knows us as one of his many faithful followers like a shepherd but we also care about our common sheep friends! It is up to us to recognize that what we have in common is Jesus our Saviour, the one who leads us if we have faith and believe. What we have in common is that we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand. We also have in common our understanding of why the Shepherd suffered and died.

Peter writes in his first letter about how Jesus suffered for us. He saw that people were like sheep and going astray; they were living sinful lives. They needed to be cared for again like the relationship between sheep and shepherd. As our Shepherd, Jesus became more than the gate for protection, he entrusted himself to be arrested tried and judged. He took it upon himself to bear our sins and died on the cross. This is so that we might live for righteousness, that is good lives loving others as Jesus taught. But how might we understand this for today?

When the early church was first established ‘they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.’ Those present knew that there was someone bigger than themselves and they were filled with awe. They were together like a huge sheepfold filled with people and they listened to the stories of Jesus. They were together.

When we think about being a part of a church family there are many reasons why we are like sheep and follow Jesus as the Good Shepherd. Sheep fare better with others. We know this when we consider the need for courage, comfort, encouragement and support through all of life’s challenges. We know a sheep on its own is more vulnerable to others.

A second reason is that there a great pasturage, and an abundant life for all who follow Jesus’ way. When we are a part of a church family, there is joy when we worship God when we expand our church family through celebrations like today- a baptism or welcoming people who are searching for God’s love along with us. And when we are taught that we have an opportunity for a good life and a more abundant life through knowing Jesus as Saviour.

Thirdly, is that there is something public, open, honest, and even simple about how we live as God's people through Jesus. Jesus is the shepherd, the door, the gate to the sheepfold and through Him we are able to draw closer to him and each other as we care and experience glad and generous hearts. Jesus leads us as the Good Shepherd, but we need to listen to His voice calling us, and showing us the way.

Have you ever been in a situation like a doctor's office and your first name is called and you respond at the same time along with someone else? It is then that the nurse or receptionist has to use your last name to identify you correctly? It can be trying and cause some anxiety but once it is cleared up you know you'll be all taken care of well. One thing for certain, Jesus knows you by name and calls to you directly.

Today we have computers generating letters and phone calls in which we are addressed by name, always seeking to gain something from us. But when God calls to us through Jesus we dare to trust that we will be fed along with all God's people. Hearing Jesus' voice does not always happen easily even for those who are closest to him. But Jesus will not abandon us or any who are close to him. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me."

We have gathered, as a church family in faith today to celebrate faith, new life and hope in Christ Jesus. As brothers in sisters in faith, we care and share with one another. Do you know the Good Shepherd, Jesus as Saviour? Do you know Jesus as the One who rose from death? Are you His sheep and do you enable Him to lead your life? These are important spiritual questions of life as we understand them to be. All sheep do stray away from the shepherd's voice from time to time. But are you walking on the path with Christ leading your way to an abundant life?

Let us pray:

Holy God of grace and hope, be with us as we grow in faith together and learn about each other, trust each other and encourage each other to live life following the teachings of Jesus.

Hear our prayers as we feel your Spirit move amongst us. SILENCE In love we pray to you God.

Amen