# Believe in the Shepherd and Love the Flock

Sermon preached by Rev. Chuck Cole at St. John’s UMC 04/25/2021

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# John 10:11-18 (New International Version)

11 “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 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. 13 The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

14 “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep 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 are not 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. 17 The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. 18 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.”

# 1 John 3:16-24

# New International Version

16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. 17 If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? 18 Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

19 This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: 20 If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. 21 Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God 22 and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him. 23 And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. 24 The one who keeps God’s commands lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

We are blessed with many beautiful stained glass windows here at St. John’s. The most prominent of which is the depiction of Jesus the Good Shepherd at the front of the sanctuary,

This window serves as a reminder of Jesus our Good Shepherd and that we along with all Christians are his gathered flock.

We are taught in our passage Jesus the Good Shepherd humbled him and became a human being coming to seek and save the lost and to give himself on the cross for us. Jesus reveals himself as the servant King who came to gather his sheep.

We are also reminded in our text of the fact that he the Good shepherd gathers his sheep both near and far. They have been scattered by sin but he gathers them including us. He gathered them before his death by his presence, by his death people are drawn to him and now by sending the Holy Spirit he has continued to gather his sheep including gathering us.

Each of us as Christians are not just individuals but we are part of one flock with one shepherd. We do not gather here in worship and fellowship and approach simply as individuals but as members of a flock united to one another by our shepherd Jesus the Good Shepherd.

Appropriately in this Easter season our text declares that Jesus the Good Shepherd laid down his life for the sheep voluntarily overcame death by his own power. He is powerful enough after having died to take his life again he

The Good Shepherd has defeated the greatest enemy of the sheep death and he can and will defeat all the other enemies of the sheep. Having overcome death (which will be silenced but we will sing on) if there is an enemy, any enemy or challenge faced by one of his sheep he is more powerful than it.

As the flock of the Good Shepherd we are called to listen carefully for his voice because he promises his sheep will hear him.

The fact that we rejoice in a Good Shepherd means also that we are his flock. We are not just individual sheep under his care we are a flock together.

Our first John passage in some ways reflects on what being part of the flock of the Good Shepherd should look like.

We are called on in our 1 John Passage to follow his commands which are two fold first

Believe in his Son - The Good Shepherd who gave his life and then took it up again.

The second part of his command calls our eyes if you will to move from the Good Shepherd to the flock he has gathered spread out throughout the world.

As a flock we interconnected and called to Love one another as he loved us.

We are called to love one another as Christ loved us. This begins by recognizing that we are sheep of his flock. We are not individuals who simply chose to be sheep; we have been gathered by him, born by his choice. We are not ours we have been bought with a price.

1 john defines love over and over again.

16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to *lay down our lives* for our brothers and sisters. 17 If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? 18 Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

To love one another is to lay down our lives for one another. This is of course not always easy. Sometimes it’s the other sheep that make it hard and sometimes it is us.

Just like we do not choose our biological brothers and sisters we do not choose our fellow flock members he has gathered us together.

There will be times when we would prefer that he had not gathered certain sheep.

Sometimes sheep bite one another for a variety of reasons or cause us or people we love pain. We are called to love not only those who love us well but those Christ has gathered. We are called to love them as Christ loved us. Christ endured pain at the hands of his disciples and the people he came to save and he laid down his life for them.

In loving his flock like He loved his flock we will be made more and more like him. So that troublesome sheep that is part of this fold is a blessing to mold and shape you. The next time you want to scream because a fellow sheep drives you crazy here or far away thank God for the grace he pours out and ask God for the strength and wisdom to love.

This love is laying down our lives.

It may at times mean laying down pride, or time, or comfort to share a word of encouragement, to share of your experience, to say a difficult word, you may need to at times lay aside what you perceive to be Justice what is due you.

We want to be careful as our verses call us to that our love for one another his flock must be more than words it must be real and tangible as Christ’s love was.

We are one flock and we are called to love one another.

Our love can be thought of in many ways but I think the five ways that we promise to love Christ through the church in our baptism, confirmation and membership ceremony are a useful way to think about this. Those five ways are through prayer, presence, gifts, service and witness.

Prayer is a laying down of ourselves for others. In prayer we offer our time, emotions and energy for others and this is powerful and can be an exhausting labor of love. Being prayed for in person hearing yourself lifted up, a hand held or on the shoulder, encourages and strengthens in a way little else does. The prayer of the flock is powerful as they lift up needs before the almighty. We are going before the Holy One through Jesus the Good Shepherd and he works as a result.

Presence is also an extremely important expression of our love for the rest of the flock.

We have lived through a period of late where many of us cannot be present as we would like. We have learned new ways by which to be present through zoom and Facebook to gather virtually. As more and more of us are vaccinated and case counts go down we will return to more normal and crucial presence.

I want to say to you as a way of laying your life down and loving the flock Your presence is important. Your presence in worship, in Bible Study, in service, in fellowship are important. Your voice lifted in song, or contribution matters, your smile matters, your joys and concerns matter, your presence matters.

Now obviously there are those times and places in life when physical presence is challenging for a variety of reasons. Obviously this is true during this time of Covid but at all times when physical illness of yourself or a loved one makes it difficult. That is understood but when you consider your presence on a Sunday morning or for a Bible Study remembers your presence matters, it is important. A missed Sunday here and a missed Bible Study there have a way of adding up very quickly and the blessing of your presence is lost to the flock. You may not always see it but your presence makes a difference, love as you are with your presence.

Your gifts matter. Gifts that meet physical needs, like filling up the Blue Ridge Food Barrel, that fund mission trips and events, that pay for Sunday school curriculum, salaries and upkeep, that support missionaries and enable ministry throughout the world are ways to love the flock be that giving to the church, individuals or through other ministries.

Gifts of your time and abilities are another way we show love to the flock both individually and together. These can take many forms building something, serving as a Sunday School teacher or chair of trustees, bringing food to someone who is sick, visiting, making phone calls, volunteering in a food pantry, cleaning the church are all ways to show love for his flock. These all matter.

Your prayers, your presence, your gifts, your service and your witness matters as an expression of love for the flock.

All the above are witnesses of love for the flock and so love for the Shepherd. We also in our words show love by our witness of faith for one another - by speaking an encouraging and hopeful word, by expressing thanks and confidence in the power of prayer during Joys and Concerns, by trusting one another with vulnerabilities, by speaking up for justice for victims of various kinds, by sharing the truth of Christ to those in need of him.

In each of these ways we recognize Jesus as the Good Shepherd and recognize and love the Flock.

Praise the Lord the Good Shepherd and Love the Flock as he does. Amen.