

Week Five: 'I am the good shepherd.'

OPENING PRAYER

READ | *John 10:11-21*

¹¹"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns 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. ¹³The 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— ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶I 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. ¹⁷The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. ¹⁸No 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."

¹⁹At these words the Jews were again divided. ²⁰Many of them said, "He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?" ²¹But others said, "These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

DISCUSS

1. Sheep are often considered the most helpless of all animals. By calling his followers sheep, Jesus is acknowledging their spiritual helplessness, dependency, and lack of self-sufficiency—*i.e.* their 'sheepness.' But this is the gospel: until a person sees how in need he is, he will never see how valuable he is to Jesus. Put another way, to see oneself as a sheep is the only way to make sense of one's need for a shepherd. When Jesus says, 'I know my sheep,' what is he saying? How does embracing our being 'sheep' grow and color our appreciation of Jesus as our good shepherd?
2. Sheep may be the most helpless of animals, but they are also the most valuable. That's why a shepherd with a hundred sheep would leave the flock in search of the one that's lost. Every part of the sheep is valuable; the sheep are the shepherd's treasure. But when a threat approaches the sheep, Jesus, instead of merely fending off the threat, becomes a lamb himself—the sacrificial lamb, in our place. Jesus looks into our heart all the way to the bottom, seeing all that passes through our minds, knowing everything we've done *and will do* and says, 'I see something so infinitely precious that I'm going to die for you.' Why is this such an incredibly strong affirmation of the dignity of the human person? Why is grace this rich and free the only thing that can lead to what Jesus promises: "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (Jn. 10:10)?

APPLY

1. Jesus' statement that he has the authority not only to lay down his life, but also to take it up again, points to the sort of abundant life he has come to give. It's a life for his 'sheep' that is far beyond anything that was possible before his death. That means the community formed by Christ is a new community based in his death, which leads to life. So the very pattern of life in this new community is that of life laid down for one another, or a *cruciform* life. Jesus taught his followers that 'whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it' (Matt. 16:25). The possibility of such a life and the power for such a life come through the life of Jesus the good shepherd, poured out on the cross. What might it look like to daily 'lay down' your life for those around you, anonymously or with no expectation of repayment in kind?

CLOSING PRAYER

Prayer suggestions: > that in Jesus, 'the good shepherd', who through his own death has brought life, we would see ourselves more fully as God does: as sons and daughters, fully restored and redeemed by his blood; that Jesus' death and resurrection would be to us such a dramatic story of grace secured on our behalf that the gospel would astonish us, and change us