

First Presbyterian Church of Plymouth, Michigan

“I Am the Good Shepherd”

Sunday, March 14, 2021

Rev. Mark Hovermale

Rev. Mark Hovermale — Welcome and Announcements

Good morning! Welcome to church today, Sunday March 14th. You're probably wondering why I am up on the roof, so to speak, on the preacher's porch. Great question! It is the quietest spot on First Presbyterian Church property right now. But this is great, because if you have only watched worship services online, this is what the preacher's porch looks like.

Why are we not inside for the videotaping, you may ask? The fire alarms were going off, so we did the best we could and moved to the preacher's porch! A special 'thank you', to not only those guys working inside the church today, but also to Susan Underhill for editing our videotape. Thank you, as well, to Darlene Maginley and Associate Pastor Ashley, who are helping. Thank you to the FPCP chancel choir for providing music that was recorded in an earlier year in the sanctuary.

We are gearing up for Easter and Holy Week. Following are our service times coming up. On April 1st, the Maundy Thursday service is going to be online only. The Good Friday service on April 2nd will be online, only, as well. Then, Easter Sunday, April 4th, there will be an online worship service and two in-person services, at 9:00 a.m. and at 11:00 a.m., in the church parking lot. We need you to pre-register your car for both the 9:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. services. We're looking at being very crowded, so please pre-register your vehicles for Easter April 4th at 9:00 or 11:00. Those in-person services are going to have both the brass ensemble and the chancel choir, live, outdoors in the parking lot.

Speaking of our awesome music ministry, if you weren't at the parking lot service last week you missed a great time of celebrating two groups of people. First, Doctor Jerry and Sharon Smith celebrated their 20 years at this church leading the choir ministry. Phenomenal! And then Sue Scott—we celebrated our organist of 38 years! We want to say a special thank you!

We will now have our opening prayer brought to us by Ashley.

Ashley S. Ashley, Associate Pastor — Opening Prayer

Let us pray. Gracious and loving God, you are eternal and unchangeable, glorious and holy, full of love and compassion, abundant in grace and truth. The works of your hands are around us in all of creation We offer you praise. Your glory is revealed in Jesus Christ, our Savior. We are gathered together to praise you. Meet us here today, help us to become more aware of the ways that you care for us, for the ways that you shepherd us, for the ways that you guide us.

May we become like faithful sheep that long to hear your voice and act according to your will. Amen.

Congregation sings “Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us” (prerecorded on July 8, 2018)

Darlene Maginley, Director of Children’s Ministry – Children’s Message

Good morning, kids. So Pastor Mark is preaching today on another one of those times in the Bible that Jesus said, “I am”. He said, “I am the Good Shepherd.”

There are a lot of places in the Bible that Jesus talks about shepherds and sheep. Well, I really want you to listen to Pastor Mark, because he is talking about a really important time that Jesus says, “I am the Good Shepherd.”

But I was thinking about another story about sheep in the Bible that kind of confused me when I was your age. There was a story about a shepherd who had 100 sheep and he lost one and he went out and looked for that one lost sheep. Now my Sunday school teachers had always explained to me that Jesus is the shepherd and we are those sheep and the 99 sheep are the ones who believe in Jesus and were saved and that one lost sheep was the one person who didn't know about Jesus yet, who didn't really believe. Now when I was a kid I always kind of wondered, well, what's the big deal? It's only one sheep or it's only one person. Jesus already has a lot of people who believe in him and a lot of people who are going to heaven.

Then one day I was putting a puzzle together. I know all of you have done this. You get all the way to the end of the puzzle, and you find out one piece is missing! Well, do you say, “Oh, it's not a big deal. It's close enough.” Of course not! You look for the missing puzzle piece. You look on the table and on the floor. You probably open up the box with the bag that the puzzle came in. You might even ask for help to look for that one missing piece, because the picture is not complete until we find that last piece. That is exactly the way Jesus is! He never gives up on that one missing piece until the very end, when all of us can be a flock of sheep together in heaven with Him.

Let's pray together today. Dear Jesus, thank you for being our good shepherd and thank you for taking care of all of us, like the sheep in your time who depended on the shepherd to be safe. Thank you for laying down your life for us, like any good shepherd would do for his sheep. And help us to appreciate that gift each and every day. Amen.

Rev. Mark Hovermale – More About Today’s Theme

Our theme today is appropriate for our current “I Am” series. “I am the good shepherd” is such a famous passage of scripture, and I don't do it justice in just one short sermon. So, please check out the gospel of John, a great book of the Bible. And check out John, chapter 10, specifically, for the “I am” statements. A lot of people reference the book of John as a great starting spot if someone is new to faith, for looking at faith. But today, specifically, we're looking at Jesus’ “I am the good shepherd” statement.

“I am the good shepherd.” What does that mean? We don't have a lot of shepherds or sheep around here, but what does that mean today? “I am the good shepherd.” You've probably heard this passage so many times. You've seen pictures of Jesus as the good shepherd. What does it mean? What can we take away from that statement to help us look at our lives today. That is what we're going to look at today.

Ashley S. Ashley, Associate Pastor — Scripture Reading

John 10:11-20

Friends, our scripture passage for today comes from the gospel according to John, chapter 10, verses 11 through 20. Let us listen now for God's word to us.

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.”

¹⁹ The Jews who heard these words were again divided. ²⁰ Many of them said, “He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?”

Friends, this is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Rev. Mark Hovermale — Sermon: “I Am the Good Shepherd”

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. We just heard that read. There are seven “I am” statements in John's gospel. Two of them are found in John chapter 10, “I am the gate” and “I am the good shepherd.”

So let's look at the idea of Jesus as the shepherd. Now the shepherd is in charge of sheep and Jesus is the shepherd. Well, that leaves us to being the sheep. Sheep are not the smartest and they smell. I'm going to leave you with that. They are also really known to wander.

So we think of a Shepherd working with sheep as easy going and gentle. Let's look at this more closely though. Psalm 23, verse 4 says this, “Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” Now you have seen pictures. The shepherd's staff would be used for many things. It would be used to guide the sheep on their journey. For sure, it would be used to guide them, but it would also be used to fight off animals and danger. The shepherd's rod has a traditional hook in the loop and that would be used to occasionally prod the animals and guide them in the right direction. Did you catch that? “A sharp hook at the end.” When I think of gently prodding me to go somewhere, maybe my wife has to get me to leave the house to go somewhere, if she starts using a sharp stick to do so, that is not “gently prodding.” Right?

So it leads me to the first question in our sermon today. Do you let Jesus lead you or are *you* leading where you are going in your life? You see, with those sheep that Jesus the good shepherd guides, sometimes he's got a problem. But the sheep know the shepherd is leading, not them, and when they get out of line and wander, he brings them back. Are

you trying to lead? Am I trying to lead my life? Or are we letting the good shepherd protect us and lead us?

Now Jesus goes into the idea of “a hired hand”. In the scripture passage he explains how he, the good shepherd, lays down his life for the sheep, which is us. Now he brilliantly contrasts that with a hired hand, who is not going to do that at all. In fact, the hired hand runs away from the sheep when danger comes, because, as Jesus says, “He cares nothing for the sheep.” Now what I need to do is ask you to hold on to this thought for a moment. I just talked about the hired hand versus Jesus. So, just hold on to that.

We're going to shift gears, but we're going to come back to that in a second. Jesus says that he knows his sheep and his sheep know him. A little earlier, John's gospel indicates the sheep know and listen to the shepherd's voice. It also says they don't listen to the stranger's voice. This comes up later in other verses. So it made me think of just a simple question. Whose voices are you and I listening to? You see, the verse and the passage show that Jesus is the shepherd. The sheep respond to that shepherd's voice, but when somebody's voice is not recognized, they do not respond to it

The voices that you and I are listening to in our lives--are they good voices? The good shepherd's voice from scripture, and from our relationship with Jesus, that's the voice for listening to. About the voices of culture and in all these different things, are they the voices we really should listen to? Simply put, whose voice are you listening to this morning?

The last point I want to bring up connects these two thoughts together. I just asked you to hold off for a second, hold on to the picture of Jesus as the good shepherd. But then we considered the hired hand, right, who doesn't care for you. Then I just talked about the voices, but I told you to hold on to that first part. Coming before it, Jesus says he lays down his life for us. Maybe a better way to look at the hired hand is being like those other voices in our lives, that aren't Jesus! Right? Those other voices—they're going to run away. They don't care about us, and I want you to think about that.

The other voices in our lives, they don't have “skin in the game” when it comes to us! They don't really care about us! Now what are “the other voices” What is the other voice that the shepherd and the sheep are hearing instead of their good shepherd? The other voices could be things like fear, money, power, selfishness. That's just to name a few, but I want you to consider this. Just think for a second, what are the other voices in *your* life now? Jesus is willing to die for us, which sets him up as a shepherd, very much apart from the other voices and the other people trying to get to the sheep. But that's not the point I want to end on. I wonder if you know what the main point I'm going to get to is?

“I am the good shepherd.” Verse 11 says the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. Did you catch that? Jesus has the power to literally lay down his own life. He says at the end of the passage, “No one takes it from me but I lay it down of my own accord.” He says he has the authority to do so.

Okay, I've heard that one hundred times; you probably have to! What's the “big deal”? All right, it proves that Jesus is not just a good prophet or a good person or even of importance in history. Only the son of God can control when they die or live. Secondly, it's one thing if someone accidentally dies for you. A crazy scenario happens, something quickly happens, and a person sacrifices themselves for someone. But if someone chooses

thoughtfully and carefully and then lays down their life for someone else, that means they have taken account of who they are laying their life down for. They put the highest value on that life, if they are willing to lay down, thoughtfully, their life for that person.

Think about this! You and I, Jesus knows everything that I've done good and, unfortunately, everything I've done wrong, and yet He looked at me and He looked at you, and He said, "It's still worth it. I am going to lay down my life, as the good shepherd, for my sheep". For His sheep, he laid down his life! So what does that mean? It leads me to a question I ask of myself all the time, and I'll ask it of you, too. Does your life, does my life, and the choices we make, reflect that awesome truth?

The good shepherd laid down his life for us. When someone puts that kind of value on you, you want to respond with thanksgiving and with living a life of gratitude. Do your, do my, choices reflect that truth?

This last part, I have got to be honest, I wasn't going to share as I end my sermon. But I just feel like I need to do this and if it doesn't quite connect for you, I understand. You see, the Jews--when they heard this message of "I am the good shepherd," and *all* these "I am" statements, they did not automatically go, "yes." Some of them did, but some of them, they were very divided. Some said he was "demon-possessed and raving mad." That's what they said Jesus was! Others disagreed and said, "How could he open the eyes of the blind, being possessed by a demon?" They thought the "I am" statements are good.

It made me realize this: Jesus, the Son of God, the good shepherd, was willing to lay down His life for us. He said so! That did not leave room for Him to be just a "good person" or "a good prophet." Either He was lying to us in these "I am" statements, either He was a lunatic who really believed these things, but they weren't true, or He was Savior. By these "I am" statements, especially, "I am the good shepherd," He does not leave you any choice except He was a liar, a lunatic, or a savior.

The answer is up to you to give for yourself. He presents you with that choice. He is the good shepherd. Are you willing to be His sheep?

Choir sings "Brother James Air" (from March 3, 2019)

Ashley S. Ashley, Associate Pastor — Prayers of the People

Let us pray. Almighty God, You sent Jesus our Shepherd to gather us together. May we not wander from His flock but follow wherever He leads us, listening for His voice and staying near Him until we are safely in His fold.

Jesus, your care extends to every member of your flock, to every single sheep, and to every one of us.

We ask for your protection, oh Lord, your care. Feed us and we shall be satisfied, heal us and we shall be whole, lead us so that we might be with you forever. Teach us to be more like you, send us out as your hands and feet, that we might join you in healing the injured, feeding the hungry, befriending the oppressed, and comforting the grieving. Fill us with your love that we may look into your world with your eyes, welcome our sisters and brothers with your joy, and offer our lives with your generosity.

As one fold, as one church, may we learn to speak with one voice and act with one body, upholding the words that you taught us to pray together, saying,

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power and the glory forever.
Amen.

Rev. Mark Hovermale — Benediction and Blessing

May you make a decision today to make the good shepherd, *your* shepherd.

And may the Father, Son and Holy Spirit bless you and yours forever more. Amen.