

Sermon: *The Good Shepherd*
Text: *John 10:1 – 18*
Date: *April 26, 2009 AM*
Place: *Jesup First UMC*

About 25 years ago, Horton Griffin was the music leader for Lifeline Ministries and I traveled all over Southwest Georgia and down into Mexico singing with Horton. Now, I don't know if you ever met Horton, but his bubble was a little bit left of center, you know? And he'd get to moving and singing and people would start staring instead of singing. So, he'd stop the singing and tell the congregation, "*Now, listen, you need to quit looking at me like a mule looking at a new gate.*"

And since I had heard that expression so many times, I made the mistake of my life. You see, one night I was out with Lord and we were talking and I started cutting the fool and Lori just stared at me. And I said ... yes, I did ... I said: "*You need to quit looking at me like a mule looking at a new gate.*" Well ... she didn't get the joke and she said: "*Just who are you calling a mule?*" Lesson # 91: be careful about the words you use when you're talking to someone you love.

It's interesting though ... that the Bible isn't too careful about that at all. You know what the Bible calls us? Sheep! Sheep! Have you ever been around sheep? Sheep are ugly; sheep are smelly; sheep are dirty; and sheep are just plain stupid. And yet, that's what the Bible calls us. The Psalmist said: "*We are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand.*" The prophet Isaiah said: "*All we like sheep have gone astray, each one to his own way.*" The Gospels say that Jesus got out of the boat one day and looked out over the

crowd and “He was moved with compassion because they were like sheep without a shepherd.”

Sheep! Sheep without a Shepherd! Now, if there's one thing that sheep need, it's a shepherd. Isn't it interesting that when God chose a king for Israel, He chose a shepherd. When Samuel went down to Jesse's house, he looked over all of Jesse's sons, but it was the youngest son, David, that God chose to be king. Could it be God intended that Israel's king would be a shepherd of the people?

And isn't it interesting that the religious leaders of Israel are spoken of in terms of shepherding? Both Isaiah and Ezekiel speak boldly against the religious leaders of their day for not shepherding the people of Israel. Even in Jesus' day, this was a struggle. So, it wasn't like Israel didn't have shepherds. Israel had many kings and many prophets and priests, but they failed to shepherd the people.

But there was a shepherd in Israel! The Psalmist said: “The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want.” And Jesus said: “I am the Good Shepherd.” We have a shepherd, a shepherd that is different from all other shepherds, a shepherd that is King among kings, Lord among lords, and Leader among leaders. ... So, what is it that makes this Shepherd so different? What makes our Shepherd “the Good Shepherd”?

First, our Shepherd knows His sheep. Verse 14 says: “I am the Good Shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, just as I know the Father and the Father knows me.” You know what I love about Lori? We've been together long enough that Lori knows me! I mean,

she really does. She knows what I'm going to do and what I'm going to say before I do it and say it. Just the other morning, I left the house, got down Harper Street and realized that I had left something at the house. So, I turned around and walked in the back door and Lori came around the corner and said: "What did you forget?" I said: "Nothing." And I just started looking! Well, suddenly, Lori disappeared and I kept looking and looking and I came back around the corner and there was Lori, leaning up against the door with my keys held out. She knows me!

But she doesn't really know me! You see, there is One who formed me in my mother's womb, who made my heart beat, who breathed the breath of life into me on July 4, 1964. That's the One who knows us!

Funny thing about this word "know" ... It speaks of intimacy. You see, He knows us by name. He knows our strengths and our weaknesses. He knows our joys and our sorrows. He knows our giftedness and He knows our deficiencies. He knows us!

And don't miss this: He invites us to know Him the same way. He said: "*I know my sheep and they know me ... my sheep know my voice.*" And He has promised us a day when "*We will know even as we are known.*"

Do you know Him? Oh friend, He knows you!

Second, our Shepherd cares for us! Because He knows us, He knows exactly how to care for us. The Psalmist said: "*The Lord is my Shepherd; I have everything I need. He lets me rest in green meadows; He leads me beside peaceful streams. He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths bringing honor to His name. Even*

when I walk through the dark valley of death, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect me and comfort me.

This speaks to us about the Lord's care. It says God provides for us. It assures us that God protects us. Jesus said: the hired hand runs when he sees the wolf coming, because "*He is merely hired and has no real concern for the sheep.*" But He cares for us. I Peter 5:7 says: "*Give all your worries and cares to God, for He cares what happens to you.*"

Now, everybody needs somebody that cares. Wednesday afternoon, I went out to Walmart to pick up some bread for Holy Communion. And I was in a hurry, you know. And there was a lady in front of me that was taking her sweet, little time. She slowly took three or four things out of her buggy and put them on the belt. And she slowly reached for her purse and pulled out her wallet. And she slowly pulled out her money. And while she was doing this she was talking with the clerk. And the clerk said: "*Ms. Jackson, you know you could have gone through the self check aisle.*" And she said: "*Oh honey, I know that, but then nobody would have asked me about my arthritis.*"

Oh friends, He cares for you.

Third, our Shepherd died for us! Verse 11 says: "*I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.*" Because He cares deeply for us, He cares about our greatest need, our alienation from God and He laid down His life so we could be reconciled to our Father. He took the punishment that we deserve.

Paul said: **"The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ His Son."**

One day a group of Vietnam Vets visited an elementary school. One of the men was sitting in a wheel chair because he had come home from the war without both legs. And one of the children went up to the man and said: "Sir, I'm so sorry that you had to lose both of your legs in the war." And the soldier looked back and said: "Son, I didn't lose my legs; I gave them for my country."

Some times when we read the story of Jesus' suffering and death, we're like that little boy: "Oh Lord, I'm so sorry you had to lose your life on the cross." But Jesus didn't lose His life; He gave His life. Verse 18 says: **"No one can take my life from me. I lay down my life voluntarily."**

Oh friends, He died for you.

Now, in light of everything the Good Shepherd has done for us, the only thing left to consider is: Am I one of His sheep?

You know, Jesus said: **"I am the door"**. The only way into the fold is through Jesus. Later in John's Gospel, Jesus will say: **"I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except by me."** Oh, there are thieves and robbers who try to enter some other way, but the sheep go in through the door.

Have you done that? Are you one of His sheep? Brothers and sisters, how close are you staying to your shepherd this morning. You know, sheep have a tendency to wander off. Have you strayed from the fold?

Let's pray ...