



11 I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. 12 But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. 13 The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. 15 As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. 17 Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. 18 No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father. (John 10:10-18)

The Eighth Sunday after Trinity.

The Collect.

GOD, whose never-failing providence ordereth all things both in heaven and earth; We humbly beseech thee to put away from us all hurtful things, and to give us those things which are profitable for us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The ten verses of John 10 preceding today's text introduce the reader to the Good Shepherd by way of the DOOR to the sheepfold. Today's text will more fully illuminate the Lord Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd whose love compels Him to even lay down His life for the sheep. In a conventional sense, the life of a shepherd seems a very costly price to pay for a mere sheep, yet, in comparison to Jesus Christ, we all are much less than sheep in value. Amazingly, Christ loves us in spite of our grievous shortcomings. It is rare indeed that a sovereign of so great a kingdom can stoop to the lowest and darkest corner of His Kingdom and choose to love the vermin of the forest such as we are. It is not our personal value that prompts the Lord to receive us, but rather His abundant and rich love that makes us appear worth loving so much as to be worth dying for. If love can be considered inversely proportional to distance and familiarity, is it not even more amazing that God loves US from His wonderful mansions on high?

11 I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. This is a verse that is absolutely swelling with love and meaning for us. 'I AM' is truly the Good Shepherd. There was never a time, nor ever shall be a time, when this is not so. Christ is the Good Shepherd of the Eternal Present. He is better than simply a shepherd who is adept at finding water of pasture for his sheep. He is far more than a shepherd who does his duty in winter's blast and summer's scorch. Christ goes far beyond the usual expectations of a shepherd. He is truly the Good Shepherd in the perfect sense. He is so very good that He will lay down His own life for the sheep. And that is precisely what our Lord did on the craggy heights of Mount Calvary. He did it as much for you and me as He did it for Paul, Peter, or even Barabbas. When viewed from this perspective, isn't it a singular honor and privilege to be called one of His sheep?

12 But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. There is a difference in the responsibility of the church to meet the physical needs of its pastor, and the pastor who seeks only filthy lucre and largess to the hurt of souls. The sacrificial clergyman who gives his heart in service to the people, and allows himself to belong to them as much as they belong to him, is not a hireling. He requires subsistence for his body just as any other. The man who comes with smooth and polished words, who pads his pocket with greater gold than is needful to live, who places his lifestyle well above the poor widow who gives out of her need and not out of her abundance – that man is an hireling! Such a man, impersonating a shepherd, sacrifices the sheep rather than himself FOR the sheep.

The hireling provides no protection for the sheep against false doctrine; in fact, he may even be the perpetrator of false doctrine. He will not stand up for the sheep against political attacks, or stand against government that attempts to undermine their right to worship and believe according to Holy Scripture. He will hide behind the false shield of the non-existent law of "Separation of Church and State" not mentioned in the US Constitution but, in fact, flatly denied thereby. If such a clause existed in the US Constitution, or any other, it would be a law that conflicts with the Higher Law of God. The hireling will shear the sheep, kill and eat the sheep, and move on to the next fold that will be deceived by his mellow words. He cares not if the sheep live or die because his future concerns are centered on wealth and NOT sheep. He leaves the surviving sheep scattered and exposed to the elements.

What is the DEFINING characteristic of the hireling? How readest thou? . **13 The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.** He "**careth not for the sheep!**" Simple, succinct, and true! Does Jesus care for the sheep? You answer that one! Did not His substitutionary death prove the matter?

With what diligence and patients does Christ persuade us of His inordinate Love for us! **14 I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.** Truly the comment is even deeper than its beauty suggests – His knowing is a deep and marital love relationship. He LOVES His sheep and that love **begets** love in return from the sheep. Why do we love Christ. Would we have loved Him first had He not known us? *We love him, because he first loved us.* (1 John 4:19) "I AM" is truly the eternally Good Shepherd of magnificent love and sacrifice. *"Some sheep always keep near the shepherd, and are his special favorites. Each of them has a name, to which it answers joyfully, and the kind shepherd is ever distributing to such, choice portions which he gathers for that purpose. These are the contented and happy ones. They are in no danger of getting lost or into mischief, nor do wild beasts or thieves come near them. The great body, however, are mere worldlings, intent upon their mere pleasures or selfish interests. They run from bush to bush, searching for variety or delicacies, and only now and then lift*

their heads to see where the shepherd is, or, rather where the general flock is, lest they get so far away as to occasion a remark in their little community, or rebuke from their keeper. Others, again, are restless and discontented, jumping into everybody's field, climbing into bushes, and even into leaning trees, whence they often fall and break their limbs. These cost the good shepherd incessant trouble." Wm. M. Thompson, D. D., (The Land and the Book)

15 As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. There is immeasurable power and force in these words of Christ. He loves us as the Father loves Him. He does not say that He WILL lay down His life for the sheep, or that He HAS laid down His life for the sheep. But, instead, He says He IS LAYING down His life for the sheep. He dies daily for His sheep from a thousand wounds of our sins. But the love of Christ for His sheep is stronger than death, or any other force. The great "I AM" works and lives in the eternal present – not simply the past or future.

16 And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. Thank God that there are 'other sheep not of this fold.' Those other sheep, whom Christ saw in His prescient vision, were you and me whose very persons were seen by Christ through the mist of centuries future. Though speaking at the moment to believing Jews (this fold), His love and election reaches beyond any racial or geographic lines. All believers shall be brought into one fold without partition of Jew and Gentile, bond or free, and male or female – for "*all are one in Christ Jesus!*"

There is a humorous and, I believe, accurate vision related in the life of John Wesley: *John Wesley once, in the visions of the night, found himself, as he thought, at the gates of hell. He knocked and asked who were within. "Are there any Roman Catholics here?" he asked. "Yes," was the answer. "Any Church of England men?" "Yes." "Any Presbyterians?" "Yes." "Any Independents?" "Yes." "Any Baptists?" "Yes." "Any Wesleyans here?" "Yes."*

Disappointed and dismayed, especially at the last reply, he turned his steps upward and found himself at the gates of Paradise, and he repeated the same questions. "Any Wesleyans here?" "No." "Any Presbyterians?" "No." "Any Church of England men?" "No." "Any Roman Catholics?" "No." "Any Baptists?" "No." "Any Independents?" "No." "Whom have you here, then?" he asked in astonishment.

"We know nothing here" was the reply, "of any of those names you have mentioned. The only name of which we know anything here is Christian. We all are Christians here, and of these we have a great multitude which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues."

Christ, without fail (for He cannot fail in any way), will certainly bring all sheep of the scattered folds into His one fold. The great owner of a large estate may own hundreds of folds of sheep scattered under separate shepherds, across the vast compass of his holdings. They seek water and pasturage that may not be sufficiently available for all sheep in one small area. But at the season of accountability, all of the under-shepherds will bring their sheep back to the central pasture of the estate. So will God bring us all into one fold at the Day of Gabriel's blast.

17 Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. The Father loves all, who weigh their love in greater measure than their own lives, in loving Him. We are all alike in this sense: unless we have died to self, we cannot be reborn in Christ. Christ died for our sins – we must also die in this world BECAUSE of sin. But the greater and more abundant life begins once we have died to

self. The old man must die if we can live the life of liberty offered in Christ. That spiritual death of the old self must happen before our physical death or we remain in our sins. If we die to self, we may, with Christ, take up our lives again. Because He rose from the dead, so are we privileged to rise in Him just as the Ark of Noah rose higher and higher as the floods of destruction grew greater and greater below.

18 No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father. `Giving' that results from force of law is not charity – only that which is freely given from the heart is properly termed charity. Nothing, outside Himself, could take the life of Christ. He is the Giver of Life, and also the Regulator of Life. Only at His volition could His life be laid down. This He freely did for you and me. But the Tomb could not hold His body in death beyond His own appointed time. That time was three days and three nights as He had promised before His passion. It must be noted that He did nothing without the full knowledge and concurrence of the Father. Perhaps a lesson for us is this: we cannot do the work of the Lord on our own power and planning. If it is not in agreement with the leading of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, our best efforts are but dust. Are there any dust piles around YOUR house, Reader?