

John 10: 1-18 The Good Shepherd 26th April 2026

Prayer: Good shepherd, lead and guide us through your word and by your holy spirit this morning we pray. Amen.

Baa, little baa... I used to love making the sheep sound when I read this book to our kids. It's called 'Little baa' and it's about a lamb that gets lost, and its mother goes to find it. She was desperate to find her lamb so she could continue to feed and protect her loved one. With the help of the shepherd and sheep dog, the mother sheep eventually finds her young one. They recognize each other's "baa's" as well as the spotty ears and familiar smell. A lovely story as we reflect on Jesus the good shepherd who loves and seeks his lost sheep. (We have a lovely church window portraying Jesus as the shepherd)

We read in John chapter 10 that Jesus calls and leads his sheep by name. They know his voice and they trust him. The image of sheep and shepherding is used throughout the bible, and it would have been a well understood illustration, not so much for us today.

In the Middle East a shepherd's role is different from the droving type we have here in Australia. We might picture a farmer on a motorbike or with a dog rounding them up from behind but in the Middle East the shepherd calls and leads the sheep from the front. He can do this because he knows them well, and they know him.

I often used to drive up the Midlands and Bass Hwy's in Tassie and I would see lots of sheep in paddocks and to me they looked pretty much the same, but to a shepherd who spent so much time with them he could tell them all apart by their colourings, or length of ears or different sounding *baas*. The shepherd might even have names for the sheep that he calls them by...long ears, spotty tail, lazy one. And the sheep will only follow if they recognize their shepherds voice, he is the one the sheep trust. Another person may use the same name but won't have the same voice and the sheep won't budge.

Jesus says he is the shepherd who knows and calls his sheep by name. He says "I am the *good* shepherd". It is one of his "I am" statements (I am the way, the truth, and the life, I am the light of the world etc). So, it is a statement to take note of. He is not just any shepherd he is the *good* shepherd.

In Ezekiel 34 the prophet speaks against the 'bad' shepherds who did not care for their flock but rather looked out for themselves.

34 *The word of the LORD came to me: ² "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? ³ You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. ⁴ You have not*

strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. ⁵ So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. ⁶ My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them.

⁷ "Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: ⁸ As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, because my flock lacks a shepherd and so has been plundered and has become food for all the wild animals, and because my shepherds did not search for my flock but cared for themselves rather than for my flock, ⁹ therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: ¹⁰ This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock. I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them.

¹¹ "For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. ¹² As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. ¹³ I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. ¹⁴ I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. ¹⁶ I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.

The Lord says he will be the shepherd of his sheep; he will search for them and feed and protect them. There are echoes of Psalm 23 here, leading his sheep to green pastures. He will rescue his sheep from the bad shepherds. Jesus is the fulfilment of this scripture and would have it in mind as he proclaims in John 10; *"I am the good shepherd"*.

As I read the bible in one year, I am currently up to the middle of Isaiah. While the prophet Ezekiel called out the bad shepherds for only looking out for themselves, in chapter 28 Isaiah calls the prophets out for their pride and being drunken and befuddled on wine.

In Jesus' day, it's the Pharisees that are being bad shepherds, placing legalistic laws, and burdens on those who looked up to them, like the bad prophets of old, they were full of pride and looked out for themselves.

The Pharisees had tried to suggest that Jesus couldn't be trusted – they kept trying to damage his name. In the previous chapter of John when Jesus had healed a blind man, they were incensed that he had healed on the Sabbath. They suggest that he was demon possessed. The Pharisees are the wolves in sheep's clothing.

Jesus says don't listen to false voices who are leading you astray. *Listen to me I am the one good and true shepherd. I am not self-appointed like the false shepherds, but I am sent by the Father, listen to my voice and I will lead you in truth and light.* Are there any false shepherds you are following today? Sadly we know of many in the church who have led others astray. If you are not sure of someone's message, test it against scripture, test it against Jesus' words, actions and attitudes.

Jesus is one who has come to rescue the lost sheep. Jesus says...*I call you by name. Follow me. For I can be trusted.*

Jesus loves his sheep – so much that he will lay his life down for them. That is what a good shepherd was prepared to do. Think of King David as a boy shepherd killing lions and bears to protect his sheep. (1 Samuel 17:34) And Jesus says he lays down his life voluntarily to save his sheep– look at verse 18 – *I lay it down of my own accord.* That is what the Father sent him to do in order to rescue his loved flock. But not just the Israelites, Jesus says there are other sheep that he will bring in also so they can be united under one shepherd. God sent Jesus to rescue the whole world...Jews and Gentiles alike. And especially sinners.

After the pharisees accuse him of eating with sinners Jesus tells a parable (in Luke and Matthew) of the shepherd who has 100 sheep and leaves the 99 to go and find the one who is lost. Jesus doesn't want to lose even one sheep.

God is in charge of this whole rescue operation. Jesus says he lays his life down, but verse 17 says *only to take it up again.* He is referring to his death and then his resurrection. And he is doing all this under the authority of God, by his command. We have just celebrated the fulfilment of this plan over Easter. Jesus' death and resurrection is the crux of our Christian faith.

In the gospel writer John's first letter chapter 3, he continues to talk about Jesus' sacrificial love for us. As Jesus followed the Father's command, so we are to follow Jesus' command to love one another. John says we ought to lay down our lives for one another, just as Jesus did to show us the greatest love. John 15 verse 13 says *Greater love has no one than this; to lay down one's life for one's friends.* Jesus demonstrated his love for us by laying down his life.

You might be thinking 'but surely, I am not called to die for someone am I?' Well probably not...but would you be prepared to if the occasion arose? Would you throw yourself in front of the bullet meant for the person standing beside you? Possibly you would for your own child or family member. That's what Jesus did, but Jesus died not just for his close family and friends, he died for all, including the most evil sinner.

Yesterday was Anzac Day when we remembered those who gave their lives to protect others and ensure freedom in our country. Apparently around 100,000 Australian men and women have given their lives in conflict since the first World War. Jesus gave his life to save and give freedom to all who put their trust in him, people from every nation.

Giving of our lives will not be the same as Jesus' sacrifice – he is the only one whose death has brought forgiveness and eternal life. But we *are* called to love others sacrificially. It is a love that gives without counting the cost, that gives without any thought of return, that doesn't weigh up if it is deserved. It is a love entirely without self-interest.

We will be celebrating Mother's Day soon. Mothers often give of themselves sacrificially...there is pain and sometimes heartache – or is that heartburn during pregnancy 😊 and the birth itself, but all worth it to bring a little loved one into this world. Then there are sleepless nights, putting your own needs on hold, worries – teenage years. All for love.

Mothers go through pain to bring life into the world, but it is nothing compared to the suffering Jesus endured on the cross that we might have *new life*. Jesus loves us even more than our earthly parents and he longs to not just give us life, but as we heard in our reading today, he came to bring us abundant life. What is that abundant life? The abundant life Jesus promised in John 10:10 *refers to a spiritually rich existence filled with peace, joy, purpose, and eternal security, rather than material wealth or ease. It is an internal transformation—a "life to the full"—that begins upon receiving Christ, offering intimacy with God and strength through trials.* I pray that you know and receive Christ's love and abundant life.

Out of that abundant love and life we receive we are to reach out to others, not just with words but with actions. How can you show God's love to others? We do it as we care for our neighbours, friends, and family. In this insecure financial environment, many are doing it tough – will you remember to collect those extra food items for the food pantry if you can.

In this individual focussed generation, we are told to look out for ourselves first...God's commands are countercultural, he calls us to deny ourselves, follow Jesus and love as he loves. Costly love. Ask God to show you how he wants you to love others. Forgiving, healing, helping, comforting, giving, sharing the good news of God's love.

God loves all his sheep, and he longs for the lost to be found in him. He knows them by name, just as he knows your name, and he has opened the gate for them to be rescued.

He calls us to join him in seeking and loving the lost sheep that they too may receive his amazing love, grace, and abundant life.

Let's pray... Thank you Lord for your abundant sacrificial love, for dying that we may live. May we truly know you as our good shepherd, trusting you and listening to your voice as you call our name and follow where you lead. Help us to sacrificially loves others as you love us. In Jesus name Amen.