

**May 8, 2022**  
**4th Sunday of Easter**  
**John 10:27-30**

"My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can take them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one can take them out of the Father's hand. The Father and I are one."

### **Background**

This short text presents an image of Jesus' relationship to his Father and Jesus' relationship with his followers. From the text itself, the reader would not be aware of the turmoil that surrounds this short passage. As Jesus taught about his relationship to God, he used a variety of images. At different points in John's gospel, Jesus has spoken of himself as: bread for the world (Jn 6:35), the light of the world (Jn 9:5), and the good shepherd (Jn 10:11). The Jews have asked Jesus repeatedly to clarify who he is and what is his relationship to God.

Jesus has also performed some miraculous acts. He has changed a large amount of water into wine (Jn 2:1-12), fed a multitude with five loaves (Jn 6:1-15), and cured a number of people including a man who was blind from birth (Jn 9:1-41).

He has also done some things that would be unthinkable for the people of his day. These include: driving out those selling items needed for sacrificial offerings in the temple (2:13-17); engaging a Samaritan woman in conversation (4:4-42); and refusing to condemn a woman who was caught in the act of adultery (8:1-11).

In the early part of his gospel, John portrays Jesus' ministry as being the center of controversy. As early as the end of the second chapter, John states that Jesus needed no one to give him testimony about human nature. He was well aware of what was in each person's heart (Jn 2:25). In chapter 5, John states that there were Jews who wanted to kill Jesus (Jn 5:18). The things that Jesus had said and done were troubling for the Jewish leaders.

Immediately preceding this gospel text, the community leaders approach Jesus and ask him to tell them plainly if he is the Messiah (Jn 10:24). This is the third time in John's gospel they have made this request. Following the short text of today's gospel, the Jewish leaders again reach for rocks to hurl at Jesus (Jn 10:31). This is the second time they have tried to stone him.

Jesus uses the image of sheep and shepherd to describe his relationship with his true followers. Sheep were held in high esteem in this culture because they did not cry out in pain but quietly accepted their fate. When a male child reached puberty, he left the care of his mother and the community of the women, and he entered the male-based society under the care of his father. His father and the other men of the community were responsible to teach him the qualities necessary to be an adult male in their society. Physical pain and punishment were essential elements to develop the toughness needed for daily life. The young boys/men were expected to faithfully and without complaint carry out the tasks given them. They were to be like sheep, who, when they were sheared each spring and eventually slaughtered, would submit to their fate without bleating. Because of this quality, sheep became symbolic of the ideal way to live.



The shepherd at the time of Jesus was a mixed image. In the past, the Jews had used the image of the shepherd to describe their relationship to God and the ideal ruler. Psalm 23, which is used at many contemporary funerals, begins, "The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want." Psalm 80 begins, "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who led Joseph like a flock." The prophet Isaiah describes the messiah as one who "... will feed his flock like a Shepherd; He will gather the lambs in his arms, and will carry them in his bosom; And gently lead those that are with young" (Is 40:11). By the time of Jesus, shepherds had lost their status. Many allowed their sheep to graze on land belonging to other shepherds, and they would entice sheep not of their own flock to follow them by imitating the voice or call of another shepherd. Also, they were not able to keep ritualistically pure, and they were not at home to protect the women and children, a major responsibility of men.

Jesus uses these familiar symbols, meaningful to the people of his day, to describe himself as the Good Shepherd. He lives faithfully the qualities of a shepherd who gives of himself tirelessly to care for the sheep entrusted to his care. Jesus uses the ideal image of a shepherd to describe his relationship to God and his relationship to his disciples.

### **Reflection Questions**

1. Are there people you know who have the qualities of a "good shepherd?"
2. Are there voices of people that you can pick out instantly?
3. Are there people who know the sound of your voice?
4. What do you associate with sheep?
5. If someone said that you remind them of sheep or a shepherd, what kind of thought would arise within you?
6. If someone was going to liken me to an animal, I would prefer..., because...
7. I think if God were to call my name, I would....
8. Jesus says in this gospel that he has given eternal life to those who follow him. How do you respond to this statement in today's gospel?
9. Can you take some time now to talk with God openly about whatever struck you in this gospel?

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