

*O God, whose Son Jesus is the good shepherd of your people:
Grant that when we hear his voice
we may know him who calls us each by name,
and follow where he leads;
who, with you and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns,
one God, for ever and ever.*

Jesus is the Good Shepherd
And unless you've raised sheep,
You probably have no idea what that means...
Or why it matters...

The image of the shepherd also showed up in this morning's Psalm

The Lord is my Shepherd

Many of you know this this passage by heart
When my family moved to Florida back in 1957
I went to South Miami Elementary School
Mrs. Bevan, third grade teacher
Began the first day of class... by teaching us the 23rd Psalm
We recited it every morning
And after a while... all the kids knew it... by heart

When we memorize things... we say we know them by heart...

Two men were asked to recite the Twenty-third Psalm.
One was a famous speaker... thoroughly trained... dramatically gifted.
It was powerful! He poured all his experience in to those words...
The Lord... is my shepherd... I shall not be in want...

The audience loved it! The stood and cheered ***Encore!***

Then the other man... stepped forward...
and read the same words... softly... intimately...
The Lord... is my shepherd... I shall not want...
But when he finished... the room was completely silent.

Then the famous speaker spoke
I have a confession to make.
The difference between what you have just heard from my old friend,
and what you heard from me is this:

I know the Psalm... my friend... knows the Shepherd.

Those who hear the shepherds voice... know him.
But as you well know...
To really ***hear*** the voice of the shepherd
we have to actually listen.

Some of you may remember Pastor Bob Gordon from Trinity Lutheran.

Years ago... he lived on a farm with a flock of 30 sheep

He'd walk into the barn and talk to the sheep
Good morning! How are you doing? Glad to see you all...
They came to know his voice... And to trust him

Now in those day's Bob had a huge beard.
He looked a little like Grizzly Adams
Had it for years...

Anyway... his wife had never seen him without the beard
And so... one day... he shaved it all off

The next morning, when he went into the barn to greet the flock
 They *heard* his voice
 But they *saw...* an *imposter!* and *freaked out!*
 They kicked through the barn wall... and fled the scene!
 Just to get away from the stranger danger...

They knew the shepherd... And he knew them
 But when the imposter came... They were afraid
 They did not trust him.

Some say sheep are stupid...
 Pastor Bob knows from experience... Sheep *know* their master.

Can the same be said of us?
Do we really know... the shepherd?
Or do we listen to posers... follow imposters...

While traveling in Spain... an American couple visited a small village.
 A heated argument broke out in a local cafe.
 The owner of some sheep was tearing into a couple of hired hands.
 There had been a fiesta in the village on the previous night.
 And not wanting to miss out on the fun
 These hired hands abandoned the sheep and went to the party.
 The sheep were found wandering the streets...
 no doubt searching for shepherds.

Even in the 21st century... a hired man doesn't care about the sheep.

Only the Good Shepherd does

The Good Shepherd protects
 The Good Shepherd watches over
 The Good Shepherd loves

a 19th century biblical scholar was traveling in the holy land
when he came across a shepherd and his flock.

The shepherd showed him the fold where his sheep spent the night.
There were four walls, and just one way in.
Smith asked

Is this is where they go at night?

Yes, and when they are in there, they are perfectly safe.

But there is no door.

I *am the door.*

Now keep in mind, this shepherd wasn't a religious man
He'd never heard today's Gospel lesson.

What do you mean YOU are the door?

*When the light has gone and all the sheep are inside,
I lie in that open space,
and no sheep ever goes out but across my body,
and no wolf comes in unless he crosses my body.
I am the door.*

That's what shepherds do
They keep the flock safe
They drive the wolf away

So when Jesus said

*Whoever enters by me will be saved
And will come in and go out
And find good pasture*

The disciples knew *exactly* what he meant

Even though *we* may not know much about sheep
We do know...
Jesus *is* The Good Shepherd
The Good Shepherd

Not *one of* the Good Shepherds
The Good Shepherd

There are others who pretend to be Good Shepherds

They are not
They are thieves and bandits and are not to be followed

We need to listen to his voice
We need to know that the one we follow is the Good Shepherd
And not an imposter

So when we encounter imposters...
We run away
Break down the wall to escape... if we have to
But we *must not* follow them
We *must* follow Jesus

Not follow the *loudest voice*
Not the one with promises they can't keep...
Not the one... *who secretly... wants us to fail.*

The Good Shepherd wants the best for his flock
Listen... for *his* voice
Listen... as he calls each and every one of you... by name.
And follow him...
Jesus *will*... lead us through these dark days... together.
Amen.