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Good News for the Insecure

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TEXT: John 10:11-18 (ESV)

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

Dear friends,

Every one of us has experienced some insecurity in our lives. Oh, we can put on a good show as confident people can take on anything, but then something happens to us and insecurity gets triggered. For instance, our health is called into question. A visit to the doctor and an X-ray shows there's a mass inside of you that looks like a cancer and a biopsy needs to be done. And suddenly you're feeling very insecure. What if it's malignant? What if I don't have much time left? You feel so helpless. Or you've worked hard for a big company and you've given your best to this company a lot of years to make it successful. The future looks certain. Then the boss calls a meeting one day and

informs you that the company been bought out by a bigger company. There's a chance they may be making some changes, even cutting some departments such as yours. And what was looking so certain is now very uncertain and you're thinking, "Who's going to hire someone at my age?" And insecurity kicks in. Sometimes people can make us insecure by the way they treat us, or when we compare ourselves to others and feel lesser than them: less intelligent, less successful, less popular, less good looking. That can lead to real insecurity in our lives. And sometimes I even meet people, Christians, who are who are insecure about their relationship of God – so insecure that they don't know whether or not they'll go to Heaven when they die.

Sometimes our insecurities show up in ridiculous ways. Quite a number of years ago, the dean of my conference called me up and asked if my church would host a weekday pastors' conference meeting. He assured me nothing fancy was required, just a room, some coffee and donuts. And I said, "No problem." A few days later, though, before the meeting, he checked in and said, "Oh, yes Steve, by the way, the host pastor usually leads the devotional time at the front end of the meeting. I'd like you to do that." I said, "Sure." Listen, I was preaching over a thousand people on a Sunday morning and it never bothered me in the least. But this... this turned me into a nervous wreck – speaking in front of my peers brought out my insecurities. "What will they think of me, of my talent, or lack thereof?" It's kind of crazy, isn't it? So, we human beings are a funny and odd lot prone to insecurity, and when it comes right down to it, we're not as in charge of our lives or as confident as we like to appear.

And that's what Jesus talks about today with us. As he's addressing the crowds who are questioning his identity after he thoroughly impressed them with his healing of a blind man, he tells them that we human beings are like sheep. Now, that's not a really great compliment when you consider it. Sheep are pretty helpless, dependent, not so smart I'm told. They can be ornery and stray away. Sure, they're of value to the shepherd who's committed to their welfare and that's a good thing. But they definitely do need taking care of. They can't be on their own. And Jesus says, you know, we're all like sheep. We're helpless and defenseless, dependent, ornery, and get ourselves into all kinds of trouble without a shepherd. Sheep need a shepherd. And Jesus says, "I am the shepherd you need. In fact, I'm the good shepherd upon whom you can count and face life with confidence."

So, what is it that makes Jesus so good? He tells us four things about himself as the Good Shepherd. First, he tells us that he's interested in our welfare. He cares about you and me. He came to lay down his life for the sheep, he tells us, and he did just that. He allowed himself to be stretched out upon a cross with his hands and feet nailed to it. He endured a cruel execution and died. Why did he do that, go through that? It was for you and me, for we were like sheep lost in our sinfulness. As Scripture tells us: "All, we, like sheep, have gone astray, each to his own way. And the Lord has laid upon him the iniquity of us all." We were on a deadly path away from God who created us for a relationship for himself. And the wages of sin is death. And we can't get home to God on our own. We can't make things right with him. Only God could fix this broken relationship between sinners and himself. And that's what he did through his son, Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd. He placed upon him – the perfect one – the sins of us all, and poured out his wrath for sin upon Jesus instead of us. He was the atoning sacrifice for your sins and mine. He laid down his life because he cares for us and wants to bring us home to our father's fold. He must really love you and me.

We also learned from Jesus that he stands by us in all circumstances because he cares about us. He describes the hired hand who deserts the sheep and allows the wolf to come and scatter and devour them. This hired hand cares nothing for the sheep, only about himself. Jesus says, "I'm the good shepherd. I lay down my life for the sheep. I stand by them. Not me, I don't run away. I won't flee from the sheep." Jesus says this is personal. "I care about each one of them and I will stand with them and protect them from their enemy." Perhaps he's talking about Satan, who seeks to destroy us; maybe even death. A few verses later, Jesus says, "Nothing can snatch my sheep from my hand."

Gerhard Frost, who was a favorite Lutheran writer of mine, tells a wonderful story of some friends who took their granddaughter to the park to watch an outdoor concert. When the music began, the little girl started to wander towards the stage and she wasn't paying attention to anything else but the band that was playing. And when the music stopped at last, she first realized she was not where she should be. There was a look of panic on her face for a brief moment. She quickly turned around. There was her grandma standing right behind her, and the child looked up and said, "Oh, Grandma, I knew I could depend on you." That kind of security is ours to enjoy as we live with Jesus, the Good Shepherd. We're able to turn around and know he will be there. He's promised us that: "Lo, I am with you always, standing with you." When we surrender

ourselves to his care, he will faithfully teach us to know that we truly can depend on him and say again and again, "Jesus, I knew I could depend on you." Thank you. Louisa Stead was a missionary in South Africa who had experienced some great hardships in her life: poor health, most of her life, and then the tragic drowning of her husband. It was after all this that she wrote the hymn that we heard earlier, a testimony of her experience with Jesus, entitled *Tis so Sweet to Trust in Jesus*. You see, she had learned along life's way she could always depend on the Good Shepherd. Listen to those words of the chorus again:

Jesus, Jesus, how I trust him, how I've proved him over and over.

Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus. All for grace to trust him more.

Third, Jesus is a good shepherd because he knows me. He says, "I know my own and my own know me." It's very personal. This is intimate language. I am not a faceless figure in the crowd or just a number in a phone book to Jesus. He knows me intimately, personally, everything. He knows everything about me. He knows my name. He knows what's going on inside of me as well as what I'm experiencing: my troubles, my trials, my joys, my pain. He knows when I'm afraid and tempted, he knows everything. I find that very comforting, especially when I'm praying – I can call upon him confidently as my good shepherd, knowing that he knows me and I know him.

And fourth and finally, he's the Good Shepherd who has all power and authority. As the son of God, he says he has authority over life and death. Listen to the words again: "No one takes my life, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have from my father." We know that he laid down his life at the cross, but then he rose again, didn't he? Snatching victory from the jaws of death. The Good Shepherd is now the risen Lord of life with full authority. And trusting in him, I am his forever. As the apostle Paul writes in his letter to the Romans, "Now, whether I live or whether I die, I belong to the Lord. And because I belong to him, I'll always be with them. I can be confident in that because Jesus is the first fruits of the resurrection, and he promises, 'Because I live,' he says, 'you shall live also.'"

Shortly after the evangelist Billy Graham died, his daughter, Anne Graham Lotz, gave an interview about what it was like being a part of the family. As they talked about his death, she said to the interviewer, "People sometimes will ask me if I'm sad. And of course I am. I miss him. But I want you to remember, I grew up never knowing where

he was because he was traveling all the time doing the Lord's work. But at least now I finally know where he is. He's with the Lord." So if you're trusting in the Good Shepherd, people will be able to say that about you. We know where he or she is with Jesus. He's good, he knows me, he cares about me so much, and he laid down his life to save me. He stands by me in all circumstances. He's the Lord of life who gives believers eternal life. Knowing all this about the Good Shepherd, a person could certainly lose some of that insecurity they have and find real confidence – Christ confidence – living under his love and care.

Which brings us to the next part of the story, which we need to ask ourselves: "What have I done with these words of Jesus about himself?" That day, we're told, the crowd's response to his words was mixed. There was a group with thought they had all the right answers and they rejected him. They said, "We think he has a demon. He's insane. Why listen to him?" You know, there are still many people who reject him today, consider him either a liar or a lunatic or evil or a fraud. They ignore him. They're lost, though, needing the Good Shepherd, and he still seeks them. He wants to rescue them and have them as his own. Maybe that's you, he wants you.

And then there are those who [said]: "His words aren't demonic. Can a demon open the eyes of a blind man?" They weren't exactly the words of solid belief. They didn't follow Jesus in faith, though they seem to be open to considering Jesus as their good shepherd sent from God for them. And maybe that's your story. You've heard it all, but you haven't committed yourself to following him. You're thinking about him. You need to entrust your life to his care. It's still not too late. Listen, he loves you, longs for you to come into his fold, have eternal life with him. It's simply a matter of admitting your sheepishness, your need for the shepherd, and for that he won't turn you away.

And then that day, there were the disciples of Jesus. Let's not forget them, they were standing there taking this whole thing in. And they continued to follow Jesus and believe in his words of eternal life. And I'm guessing that a good share of you listening to this message today fall into this category – you're following him. And the encouragement and application for you in all of this is for you to keep following him. Keep believing in him, keep serving him, and keep listening daily to him, to his words that he gives us in scripture. Keep working at getting to know him personally more and more through scripture. Build your life upon his guidance and promises. As the apostle Peter said to Jesus when Jesus was asking if the disciples were going to quit following

him, he said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." That's what they are for us insecure, dependent sheep. They're words, these words which give life.

So, take the Good Shepherd at his word today, trust him with your life. And I guarantee you will find yourself moving from being full of insecurities to great hope and confidence, Christ confidence. Let's pray:

Good Shepherd. We admit to you today that we are sheep and we need you. By the power of your Holy Spirit, help us to entrust ourselves to your care, to your guidance, to your leading. And through your word, as we continue to live in it, give us grace to trust you more and more. Amen.