

Other Sheep

^{NRS} **John 10:11** "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away-- and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³ The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep.

¹⁶ I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father."

We live at an anxious time. We're at war in two countries at the other end of the world. We're still in the middle of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. The Blazers lost in Game 6. And now on top of everything else, like we didn't have enough to worry about- there's a possible pandemic going on.

I mean have you ever had those days when you look up and say to God- OK, I think we're good here. I think you can move on, maybe?

Oh it's an anxious time. It's enough to make you want to stay home and pull the covers up over your head, you know?

And anxiety- anxiety shapes us. It affects us. It affects us as individuals and it affects us as a people.

Anxiety, the word comes from the Latin word *anguere*- meaning to constrict or strangle. When we feel anxiety it's like we're being hemmed in, it's like our very lives are being squeezed and choked.

And you know what this feels like personally. When you're attacked. You immediately feel the rush of adrenaline and what psychologists call the fight or flight response. All your senses kind of shut down, and you're just able to make the most basic of decisions- whether someone is a friend or foe- and whether to run or not. All subtly, all nuance- these are a luxury.

This happens to us as a culture as well. When cultures feel anxiety- their language, their art, their literature- they all reflect what's going on the world. The show 24, where Kiefer Sutherland plays Jack Bauer, thwarting terrorist attack after terrorist attack- this just wouldn't have made any sense before 9-11. It's a show that reflects our anxiety.

Well, the only upside to all of this anxiety is that it makes it easier than ever to hear the New Testament, and especially the Gospel of John. I mean the first century Christian community- I mean this was anxiety city.

For one thing the Romans are a constant fixture- they've taken over to the point of actually destroying the second temple. The Romans are like the country you NEVER want to mess with. We're discussing whether it's a good idea to water board people- the Romans would line the streets of cities that were out of line with crucifixions, sometimes lighting them on fire at night like gruesome street lights, to serve as a warning to anyone thinking of trying any funny business.

And for Palestinian Christians in John's day it was worse- the tension between the Jewish community had finally erupted. The Jews passed a law barring Christians from

showing up at synagogues on pain of death. So the Romans hated the Christians. The Jews hated the Christians. It was a time of INCREDIBLE anxiety.

And so it's no surprise in John's Gospel that this anxiety shows up in a kind of black and white, us and them, kind of feel.

In the very beginning for instance John is talking about how Christ is the light, the light of the world- and he contrasts this with the darkness, saying how the darkness will not be overcome by light. Light and dark- I mean it's as literally black and white as you can get. And all through Jesus is constantly asking people to make decisions. In one of the great evangelism texts of all time in John 6 Jesus has this huge crowd of people that have been following him and he tells them that if they want to follow him they have to eat and drink the flesh and blood of the Son of Man. Now we get this is communion imagery- but the people freak out and say he's crazy. And everyone, everyone but the disciples leave.

Take our text this morning. In our text this morning it starts out sounding exactly like we'd expect. Jesus is telling everyone that he is the good shepherd. The GOOD shepherd. And of course if you have a good guy- we need a bad guy to match. And we have it. We SO have it. Jesus is the good shepherd, and then we have a big, bad wolf- a world who is looking to snatch and scatter the sheep. So it's like this cosmic face off between light and dark, good and evil- we have the Good Shepherd in one corner going up against the big, bad wolf in the other.

And there are others, too. There are the sheep, of course. That's you and I. And then there are the hired hands- this is a dig against pastors. Jesus is frustrated with the

way he sees most pastors in the church of the day just going through the motions, but none of them really caring for their people. But the main action is between the Good Shepherd and the wolf. And the message is that the Good Shepherd will keep the protect the sheep from the wolves. As long as the Shepherd around- we are all good.

And this speaks to us, doesn't it? It spoke to John's community and it speaks to us. Because you and I know about wolves, don't we? You and I- we've been hurt. People have said things, done things to us- things that try as we might, we just cannot bring ourselves to forgive.

Worse, sometimes we've been the wolf. Sometimes even when we haven't even meant to- we fired off that email, or in the heat of the moment we crossed the line, and we knew we shouldn't do it- but for whatever reason we just couldn't stop. And then after you've crossed the line- well there's not going back. There's no turning back time for us.

Oh, we know wolves. And the hardest thing about being bitten by a wolf- it isn't the initial bite. That stings. But it's when the wound sets in. When we can't figure out how to forgive. And the infection embitters us, lasting far longer than the initial hurt.

And the way Jesus starts off here- pitting the Good Shepherd against the Bad Wolf. We feel like it's him and us against the world. And this sounds so good.

But then he does something SO much better- SO much more interesting. Did you hear it? What's amazing about this text, what's astounding about this text, is that Jesus doesn't stop with the Good Shepherd and the wolf. He does this crazy thing down below. In one line, in one line, Jesus does something that completely astounds us. After setting

up this black and white kind of thing- he throws this monkey wrench into the works. He says it's not just about us- it's not just about our flock. He says there are other sheep. Sheep not of this fold. Sheep you and I don't know- sheep we don't even recognize as sheep.

And moreover, Christ tells us he's dreaming not of a time when good beats evil and the Shepherd kills all the wolves- he dreams of something so much better. He dreams of a time when the only thing that exists- is ONE FLOCK. ONE FLOCK- and all are sheep; and there are the sheep that we know, and there are those other sheep, the sheep we don't, but the sheep that he knows, nevertheless.

And the good news is that he's the Shepherd here, isn't it? Not you and I. Because you and I? You and I- when someone hurts us. When we hurt another. We almost can't help it- we can't see this person as one of Christ's sheep anymore. We only see the teeth. We only see the wolf.

But Jesus- he's telling us here; we may act like wolves, but he knows us better than that- and he knows that underneath we're all only sheep. Maybe sheep that don't listen well, maybe sheep that bite like dogs- but sheep, nonetheless.

A lot of you know I took off a couple of weeks ago. I traditionally take off the week after Easter and head into the mountains. And, those of you who have been around for a while...you know this hasn't always worked out for me so well.

The first time I took off after Easter was probably the worst. I ended up heading into the Cascades- I went into the Middle Santiam Wilderness. And you know, I didn't know anything about Oregon. So I did some research. And I learned this area was best

July through September. And I thought- best. Hm. Well, maybe March won't be the best, but it'll probably be ok. What the book didn't say was that while it probably is BEST in the summer- it can kill you in March. I mean really- that would have been helpful information. So that trip, I wound up packing in and then getting snowed on. It was probably only two feet or so- but every time I tell it, there's a bit more everytime. So I think we're up to like a blizzard of 5 feet of snow at this point. Anyway, that wasn't good.

I also shared, like an idiot, about the time I lost Melissa's car keys on my epic trip to Eagle Cap in the Wallowas. Now, to me the important part of that story is that I FOUND the keys, but for some reason the only thing any of you remember is that I lost them.

So, I'll admit my track record isn't great. Although, as I keep pointing out, I'm getting better. I carry so much extra gear now- you know those tourists with like 8 cameras. That's what I look like hiking around out there- got my GPS, my satellite beacon, my cell phone- I mean I've got everything.

Well this trip I headed to Hell's Canyon right on the border with Idaho. And it was beautiful. It was amazing. It's the deepest canyon in North America- even deeper than the Grand Canyon. And believe me you feel it hiking down and back. I was out for three days- it was great.

So when I came out, I came out faster than I expected. I actually saw a rattlesnake right off the trail in the morning- I think that had something to do with kicking me into high gear. So, I made it out early, and I decided to make it a little easier on Melissa, I'd head back early. Being bushed though, I knew I wasn't going to make it all the

way home. So I stop over at a nice place right on the Lostine River. I set everything up. I eat my dinner. And it's only like 8, but I'm bushed, so I'm just about to head off to sleep, when a voice asks if anyone's in my tent. I poke my head out to meet Larry- a big guy in his early 40's. He actually looks pretty nice, not too scary. He says he wants to make a fire and do I mind. And I don't. So he asks me if I can help him. I'm like, whatever. So I give him a hand. I quickly figure out Larry is pretty intoxicated, and I don't like this, but I figure hey- it's the boonies. No big deal. And then Larry starts talking, and it becomes pretty clear that he'd like for me to come home with him- back to his cabin. He said it'd be a lot nicer than staying out there in the cold. Beginning to get a little disturbed I thank him for the offer and tell him I'm pretty happy where I am. Clearly unhappy, he says he needs to get something. He heads back to his truck, and he comes back with another piece of wood- and a hand gun he has in a holster on his waist.

The hairs on my back literally raised up. This was not good. And it only got worse. I'll spare you the details, but Larry became darker and darker- warning me about all the terrible things that had happened to people out there and how terrible it would be if anything were to happen to me.

Long story short, but I managed to talk my way out. I just ended up thanking Larry for his warnings and saying he obviously knew a lot more than I did about the area, and I'd probably better take off. And after a few very tense moments, he did let me go. But it was awful. Awful.

And the wisdom of going out alone aside, what he did was wrong. And even though I tried, I tried so hard to just put it out of my mind and focus on the great part of my trip- I haven't been able to do that.

And even though my entire life is wrapped up in following in the way of Jesus, a way of forgiveness, I'm still really angry at him for doing this- and I think it's going to be a long time before I'm not. I not only can't forgive him- I don't want to right now.

When I think back to what happened, and I'm still thinking about it quite a bit- I don't even really think of him as a person; just a wolf.

Do know what I like the best in the text this morning? To me the best thing is that Jesus doesn't say that there will be one flock and that it is somehow up to us and us alone to turn all the wolves into sheep and to welcome them into our pen.

The wolves in your life, the people who have hurt you, really hurt you- it's just not always possible to forgive what they have done. It's not like you have a button on your head marked 'forgive' and you can push it and all your bad feelings go away. It's just not like that.

But while our arms aren't always wide enough to forgive- we follow one whose arms are. And maybe when I think about Larry or about the host of others who have hurt me over the years, maybe when I think about them all I can see is wolves' clothing, I follow a man who is able to see the sheep, the hidden possibilities, inside of them. And I give thanks for this.

Friends, this morning think about the people who have wronged you. Think about the times you have wronged another. And if you can't bring yourself to forgive- then offer this person, offer this name, to Christ in your heart. And if you can't bring yourself to untie the knots of unforgiveness in your heart- rest in the grace of knowing that Christ

died for all, even the wolves, and in the fullness of time even the wolves might hear his voice and join all the other sheep in the warmth of his love. **Amen.**