Sermon Title: The Good Shepherd

Text: John 10:1-18 -- "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. 2 But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. 5 A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." 6 This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. 7 So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. 9 I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. 11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 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. 13 He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing 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 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. 17 For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. 18 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."

Opening: Several years ago, a **33-year-old** truck driver named **Larry Walters** made national news. Larry had a habit of spending his weekends in his Los Angeles backyard, just south of L.A. International Airport, drinking Pepsi and eating peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. He would sit in his favorite lawn chair staring at the houses around him in his subdivision. Not a real exciting life. One day abject boredom prompted Larry Walters to buy some balloons and a tank of helium. He figured on tying the balloons to his lawn chair, filling them with helium, and floating up for an aerial view of the neighborhood. He judged he'd get no higher than 100 feet, but just in case, he got out his BB gun and loaded it. He planned to regulate his altitude by shooting out a couple of balloons. I'm not sure how many six-packs of...Pepsi...he had consumed when he came to that idea, but he decided it was worth a try. So, Larry Walters of Los Angeles went out and bought 45 big weather balloons, a huge tank of helium, and some rope. First, he secured his lawn chair to the ground then, he filled the balloons with helium. One by one he tied them to his lawn chair. Before lifting off he went in the house and got another six-pack of Pepsi, a couple of PB&J sandwiches, and his BB gun. Then he went out and sat in his lawn chair. He had instructed his neighbors to cut the ropes securing the chair when he was ready. "Let's go!" he yelled, the ropes were cut. But he didn't go 100 feet. He went up 11,000 feet. Shot straight up in the air! And the BB gun? It was useless since he was using both hands to hang on to the chair for dear life. He zoomed straight up into the landing pattern at LAX. The pilot of an approaching Continental DC 10 reported that he had just passed a man in a lawn chair, and the control tower told him to report in immediately upon landing. They thought the *pilot* may have been drinking a little too much...Pepsi. Can you imagine being a passenger in that plane? "Look, Mom, out the window! There's a man in a lawn chair!" Eventually, they sent up helicopters to rescue Larry Walters. They closed the airport and diverted all landings and takeoffs at LAX while they played tag with this fellow in his lawn chair at 11,000 feet. When they finally got him down, he was surrounded by TV crews, the police, fire and rescue squads, and plenty of curious people. It was a major event. "**Were you scared?**" asked one of the TV reporters, thrusting a mike in his face. "**No, not really,**" said Larry. "**Are you going to do it again?**" asked another reporter. "**No**," said Larry. "**What in the world made you do it the first time?**" Larry Walters thought about it for a moment and said, "**Well, you can't just sit there**." Larry Walters is right. You can't just sit there. Not when God has something exciting for you to do. Don't be content to just sit there wasting time, doing nothing. Don't go through life watching from the sidelines while everyone

else plays the game. God wants you to be a participant! Jesus came to bring us life, but if we're going to experience it, we can't just sit there! We must follow the Good Shepherd. ***We know the Good Shepherd by His good works.***

Background: In **John 9**, we learned about a man born blind who had been healed by Christ. As a result of his testimony to the Pharisees, he was treated harshly and thrown out of the synagogue -- **John 9:24-34 -- "Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner." 25 He answered, "Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." 26 They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" 27 He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" 28 And they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. 29 We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." 30 The man answered, "Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. 31 We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. 32 Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." 34 They answered him, "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast him out**. Now Jesus seeks to share the difference between the thieves and robbers and Himself as the Good Shepherd. **Whereas they cared nothing for the sheep and exploited them for their purposes, Jesus was and is consistently good in His treatment of His sheep**.

He Leads Us (John 10:1-5 -- Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. 2 But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. 5 A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers"). In this text, Jesus uses sheep farming as a metaphor to help His listeners understand **the identifying characteristics of a good shepherd**. The details were familiar to John's readers. The sheep are in a sheep pen. It was a large, independent enclosure where several families kept their sheep. A watchman was hired to guard the gate. **Those who had the right to enter would do so through the gate. Any whose interest was in stealing or injuring the sheep would attempt to find another, illegitimate, way in**. The Pharisees were a lot like the shepherds of Israel from Ezekiel's day. They cared very little for their flock. Listen to what God said of the shepherds of Israel through His prophet -- **Ezekiel 34:1-6 -- The word of the Lord came to me: "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord God: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. So, they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them.** God insisted that the sheep (Israel) were His flock and that He would rescue them (**See Ezekiel 34:10, 11, 15**). Here's how our Lord describes His relationship with His sheep.

- **He leads us personally**.
  - **We listen to His voice**. Jesus' authority over His sheep is not validated by signs, but by their response to His voice when He speaks. Certain shepherds did not even have to enter the sheep pen to call their sheep. They would simply sound out their own particular call while standing outside of the pen and their own sheep would gather around them.
  - **He calls us by name**. The Good Shepherd goes further: He calls His own sheep by name, (i.e. individually), and leads them out. By the way, this presupposes that these sheep were somehow

Christ's sheep before He called them by name (**John 17:1-2 -- "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, 2 since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him** – the verb is in the perfect tense meaning it is something that happened in the past that continues to be true in the present).

- **He leads us purposefully**. He goes before us and leads us according to the purposes of God. Do you remember that Moses prayed for a successor who would lead the people of God out of the desert and into the land of the Canaanites? The one God provided was ***Joshua***, which in Greek is translated as "**Jesus**", obviously the name given to our Lord that means **Jehovah is salvation**. Joshua was called to lead the people into the Promised Land. Our Lord came to lead people to a different, but far more significant, kind of promise. The Apostle Peter put it like this in **Acts 2:38-39 -- Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off — for all whom the Lord our God will call**. **Listen**: Christianity is not about religion. God is not impressed with religion (**See Amos 5:21-22**). **It is a personal relationship with God through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. This is why He came into the world.** Jesus rejected the Jews and their rules. He offered not a religious system to follow, but Himself. If you cannot say that you have this kind of relationship with Christ, it may be that you are not yet in His flock but follow a different shepherd. (**Review: The Good Shepherd LEADS us.)**

He Liberates Us **(John 10:7-10 -- So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. 9 I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly)**. In these verses Jesus slightly alters the metaphor, so that now He is not the Shepherd, but the gate by which the sheep come into the pen. The only sheep, therefore, in the enclosure are those that enter through Christ. **Thieves and robbers in this context are the Messianic pretenders who promise the people freedom, but who lead them into war, suffering, and slavery**. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, achieves freedom for his people by a cross.

- **He liberates us by providing salvation**. There is only one means of receiving salvation and it is Christ (**See John 14:6; Acts 4:12**). The world offers humanistic, political saviors, and only too late does it learn that they steal, kill and destroy. **Roy Clements says, "*Jesus is right. It is not the Christian doctrine of heaven that is the myth, but the humanist dream of utopia*."** JESUS IS THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN TRULY SAVE US! **AND IF THE SON SETS YOU FREE, YOU ARE FREE INDEED** (**John 8:36**).
- **He liberates us by providing security**. Not only did Jesus bring us life, but the life He brings is abundant. The term suggests fat, contented, flourishing sheep, not those who are terrorized by predators. ***How is it that we acquire this kind of contentment and satisfaction, this kind of security***? By understanding that as the gate to the sheep pen, Christ only provides entrance into His fold for those who come to the Father through Him. No thieves, no robbers, and no illegitimate shepherds are permitted access to His flock. **Pastor Leith Anderson** shares this observation about shepherds and their sheep from a book written nearly a quarter of a century ago by a former shepherd, **Philip Keller**. He titled the book ***A Shepherd Looks at Psalm Twenty-Three***. He tells about his experience as a shepherd in east Africa. The land adjacent to his was rented out to a tenant shepherd who didn't take very good care of his sheep: his land was overgrazed, eaten down to the ground; the sheep were thin, diseased by parasites, and attacked by wild animals. Keller especially remembered how the neighbor's sheep would line up at the fence and blankly stare in the direction of his green grass and his healthy sheep, almost as if they yearned to be delivered from their abusive shepherd. They longed to come to the other side of the fence and belong to him. WHO WOULDN'T WANT TO BELONG TO THE GOOD SHEPHERD WHO OFFERS ABUNDANCE AND SECURITY TO HIS SHEEP? (Review: The Good Shepherd LEADS us and LIBERATES us.)

He Loves Us **(John 10:11-15 -- I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 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. 13 He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing 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). Two things to note here.

- ***The sign of His love***. He lays down His own life and does so of His own choice (**I lay down my life of my own accord – verse 18**). Far from being accidental or imposed by others, Jesus willingly laid down His life. This sacrifice is what qualifies Him to be the Good Shepherd. The assumption is that the sheep are in mortal danger and can only be saved by the death of the Shepherd, the One who loves the sheep. And, of course, that is exactly what Christ did for us!
- ***The source of His love***. Jesus loves us because the Father loves us. Jesus always does what is pleasing to the Father. He loves the Father and so always obeys Him just as our love for Christ is communicated in obedience as well (**See John 14:15**). ***Jesus' relationship with His Father mirrors His relationship with His sheep***. **Just as the Father and Son are intimately acquainted with one another, so the Lord is intimately acquainted with us and we are with Him**. What a beautiful picture of salvation. In **verse 16**, Jesus declares that He has sheep in other folds (**John 10:16 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).** Praise the Lord that the Gospel is for everyone.

Closing: JESUS, OUR GOOD SHEPHERD, LEADS US (personally and purposefully), LIBERATES US (by providing salvation and security) AND LOVES US (so much so that He laid down His life for us). Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift! **We did nothing to earn our salvation and we certainly don't deserve it. We just receive it with eternal gratitude**. In ***Planet of Rebellion***, **George Vandeman** writes: It was **May 21, 1946**. The place: **Los Alamos**. A young and daring scientist was carrying out a necessary experiment in preparation for the atomic test to be conducted in the waters of the South Pacific atoll at Bikini. He had successfully performed such an experiment many times before. In his effort to determine the amount of U-235 necessary for a chain reaction--scientists call it the critical mass--he would push two hemispheres of uranium together. Then, just as the mass became critical, he would push them apart with his screwdriver, thus instantly stopping the chain reaction. But that day, just as the material became critical, the screwdriver slipped. The hemispheres of uranium came too close together. Instantly the room was filled with a dazzling bluish haze. **Young Louis Slotkin, instead of ducking and thereby possibly saving himself, tore the two hemispheres apart with his hands and thus interrupted the chain reaction**. By this instant, self-forgetful daring, he saved the lives of the seven other persons in the room. As he waited for the car that was to take them to the hospital, he said quietly to his companion, "***You'll come through all right. But I haven't the faintest chance myself.***" It was only too true. Nine days later he died in agony.

You know, Jesus demonstrated His love in that He laid down His life for His sheep. It was His choice and in keeping with the Father's plan. In so doing, He brought us life, which can only be described as full and abundant. WHAT A GOOD SHEPHERD!