

Sunday – May 15, 2011
Pastor - Rev. Walter W. Westbrook
Sermon – **The Good Shepherd**

St. Matthias UMC
Fredericksburg, Va 22405
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Scripture: John 10:1-10

Jesus as the good shepherd is one of the most popular images for him throughout the history of the church. We can see it in stained glass windows, on banners, in books (usually with the 23rd Psalm).

However, shepherds were not reputable people in first century Palestine. What had been a noble occupation a thousand years before, when David had been a shepherd before becoming king, was now the work of hired hands who were desperate for a paycheck. The sheep did not belong to them, and they were not going to risk their lives for any or all of the sheep under their supervision (vss 11-14).

“Good shepherd” is like “Good Samaritan.” Not how people of that time and place thought of any shepherds. John says the disciples didn’t understand the “figure of speech” Jesus was using. It was too strange for them. But, Jesus **IS** the good shepherd because the sheep belong to him.

He calls his own sheep by name. This is a very intimate image of how much Jesus loves his followers. He knows each one by name, and each one is important to him. He doesn’t love just “the flock,” but each one individually.

But, realizing the disciples were not following his line of thought, he switches up, from being a shepherd to being a gate. As the gate, Jesus **is** the way in to life. As the shepherd, Jesus **leads** us into life. As the gate, Jesus **IS** life. As the shepherd, he leads us by laying down his life for us.

These are two “I am” statements that Jesus makes about himself. These “I am” statements are found only in John. We all know these statements very well: I am the vine, the light of the world, the bread of life, the resurrection and the life, the way/the truth/the life, just to name a few.

These images help us enrich our understanding of who Jesus is - but not just who he is, but who he is in relation to those of us who follow him. And, who we are as a church is directly linked to who we think Jesus is.

If we think of Jesus as the good shepherd, how does that mold our self-image as his flock? How do we reflect the image of Christ out into the world? How does the world see our community? Does the world see Jesus as our head, leading us?

As we anticipate our Homecoming next week, as we enjoy seeing old pastors and old friends, as we celebrate being out of debt for the first time in the life of this church, as we worship together and break bread together...in other words, as we enjoy ourselves at this great party we'll be having next Sunday, let's take this opportunity to reflect and consider who we are and why we're here.

We are an outpost of the kingdom of God, founded in Christ's name and for his sake by a small band of people called by God to plant a church right here.

Are we living out the vision they had caught from Christ?

Are we a beacon of light in the midst of darkness?

Is Grafton Village a better place because we are here?

How can we deepen our impact on the lives of our neighbors?

How can we bring more people to Christ? In 2065, when this church celebrates its centennial, what will it be like?

What will Fredericksburg be like? The world?

Whoever we turn out to be, the Good Shepherd calls us by name, beckoning us to follow him into the world to be his hands and feet and voice. The important thing is to be loyal to the call, faithful to the Good Shepherd, following where he calls us, going where he sends us, joining him in ministry.

Whatever shape that takes, however it changes the church through the years, we can't know for sure. It doesn't matter. What matters is that we listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd, and find new and exciting ways to follow him wherever he leads.