

Opening

Check-in & Introductions

The Good Shepherd

The Bible Story

Please watch the story, following the link provided. If you would like to read the story as well, the text has been provided below.

Watch the Story *(Biblical adaptations written by Rev. Brenda Stobbe)*

Together, watch the children's story time found on Manchester Children & Families Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/178276089786532/>

Gospel Lesson

John 10:1-21 (NRSV)

¹ "Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. ² The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers." ⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁷ So again Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go 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 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."

¹⁹ Again the Jews were divided because of these words. ²⁰ Many of them were saying, "He has a demon and is out of his mind. Why listen to him?" ²¹ Others were saying, "These are not the words of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

Wondering Questions (Part I)

"Wondering Questions" are open ended discussion questions. These are the same questions that our children are working through!

Wondering Questions for Children *(written by Rev. Brenda Stobbe)*

1. I wonder what names the sheep had?
2. I wonder how the voice of the Good Shepherd sounds?
3. I wonder how it feels to be in a sheepfold?

Wondering Questions for Older Children *(written by Rev. Brenda Stobbe)*

4. In this story it was the shepherd who was responsible for the sheep. He took his responsibility very seriously. Who is responsible for you? Do they take their responsibility seriously? For whom or what are you responsible? Are you faithful to that responsibility?
5. The Good Shepherd was known to the sheep by the sound of his voice. Think of the voices of people you know. Who do you know by their voice? How do you feel when you hear the voice of certain people: your mom or dad, your brother or cousin, your best friend the school principal, your coach or teacher? Which of these people is most like the Good Shepherd for you?
6. The Good Shepherd is even willing to lay down his life for his sheep. He will die to protect them. Is there anyone you know who would die to protect you? Is there anyone you know for whom you would be willing to die?

What's Going On

In the Good Shepherd children's curriculum, a section called "Teacher Helps" is provided. This section gives a deeper background to us adults Please take turns reading through this section.

Teacher Helps *(written by Rev. Brenda Stobbe)*

This parable is unlike any of the others used in our program because it is a combination of both the parable of the Good Shepherd in John 10: 1-15 and Psalm 23, commonly known by its first line, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." The emphasis on good green grass, cool water and the dark places are from the psalm while the rest of the parable is from the Gospel of John.

The primary learning in this parable experience is the special relationship the Good Shepherd has to the sheep. The Good Shepherd is well known to the sheep and the sheep to the shepherd. They recognize his voice and he can tell the difference between sheep to the point that he can call them by name.

For the people of Jesus' day, the shepherd was one of the best-known figures. He would be seen by everyone at one time or another as he went on his way moving the sheep from pasture to pasture. Note that in our parable, as in Psalm 23, the shepherd does not drive his sheep to the place they need to go. Rather, the Good Shepherd leads the sheep. The relationship is so secure and certain that the animals will follow him without him needing to walk behind them to be sure there are no stragglers. They understand their source of security.

Mention is made of the ordinary shepherd who is not familiar with the sheep and who will not care for them. This is a piece of the parable, however, I've chosen not to emphasize. Instead, I have emphasized the characteristics of the Good Shepherd. This is in keeping with a continual assurance for the children that the Good Shepherd is the one who cares for them, even to the point of laying down his life for the sheep.

Some scholars do not consider the teaching of the Good Shepherd to be a parable. It does not follow the form of most parables where a question is asked of Jesus and he responds with a parable rather than a direct answer. It is used in this class as a parable because it teaches the relationship of Jesus and the people of God most effectively. In fact, this is the only parable that speaks to the "I Am ..." phrase that is found so often as Jesus tried to define just who he was to the people that followed him.

This parable is found in the Gospel of John. John is a very different book from the other gospels. Scholars believe that the writer was one of the twelve who basically assumed that persons knew the events of Jesus' life. This gospel then concentrates on interpreting what happened in key events and explaining them to early believers. The Gospel of John is dated approximately AD 90. It is a book full of familiar images and favorite stories. It is also the gospel in which Jesus is portrayed as being the most honest with his followers about who he is and what his task is in this world. Reading the Gospel of John leaves no doubt that God, the creator is revealed through Jesus, the Christ.

In the text of John the discourse on the Good Shepherd follows the incident where Jesus had healed a blind man on the Sabbath. According to Jewish tradition that was against the law. Healing was considered work and work was forbidden on the Sabbath. The text continues with the responses of Jewish authorities to Jesus' act of healing. The blind man was questioned by the authorities who eventually cast him out. Jesus goes back to the newly sighted man and asks him if he believes in the Son of Man. The man is not sure who Jesus refers to until Jesus points to himself. The man responds simply, "Lord, I believe." For the author of John to follow the story of the healing with Jesus' statements about himself being the true shepherd is significant. In placing the discourse where he did, the author acknowledges that Jesus held the needs of persons higher than the law.

The wondering questions of the Good Shepherd parable lend themselves to imaginative responses. Don't be surprised though, if the children name themselves as a sheep. There may be the older child who questions outright, "Is Jesus the Good Shepherd?" A good response would be "What do you think? Why would Jesus be like the good shepherd?" Remember that it's OK to wonder. The Good Shepherd class should be a place where the children feel free to ask any question without fear of being put down or told they are wrong. If a statement is completely incorrect, you may respond with something like, "Maybe an easier way to understand it would be." Never be afraid to admit to a child, or an adult for that matter, that you don't know an answer. But be sure to tell them that you will find out by next week. Your church library and clergy are resources for questions and observations that stump you.

Wondering Questions (Part II)

Wondering Questions for Adults

1. How might a child hear this story? What might this story mean to a child?
2. How many people in your life would you say really "know" you? What does it feel like to be truly known? How can you tell when someone knows your truest self?
3. In this week's scripture reading, Jesus talks about having "other sheep that do not belong to this fold" who know his voice, too. Who do you think are modern day "other sheep?"
4. Rev. Dr. King interprets the words of Jesus in John 10 as saying, "my influence is not limited to the institutional Christian church." What is the difference between "the institutional Christian church" and "the Body of Christ?" List good and bad aspects of each.

Closing

Prayer

Good Shepherd,

Thank you for knowing us so well. Thank you for letting yourself be known to us. Your loving care leads us to abundant life, and we are so deeply grateful. Help us to create a welcoming space for all the sheep of your expansive, diverse, and beautiful flock. In your name, in your presence, and by your grace we pray **Amen**.

Study Link

<https://manchestermc.org/all-church-study/>

[Jesus is] saying in substance that "I have people dedicated and following my ways who have not become attached to the institution surrounding my name. I have other sheep that are not of this fold. And my influence is not limited to the institutional Christian church." – Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.