

**Sunday, May 12, 2019 – Fourth Sunday of Easter**  
**“A Shepherd Like No Other”**

John 10: 22-30

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Story Interrupted

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Telling the difference between what's real and not is an essential life skill. If someone's trying to hawk designer sunglasses off a sidewalk display at bargain basement prices, they're probably knockoffs. If you're buying sports memorabilia, you'd better make sure it has been certified as authentic by the right people and get a certificate that says so. We have to take a good look at our news sources too for unbiased reporting. For the expert, for the skeptic, for one with a wise and discerning eye, the genuine article is like no other.

A similar question, a question of authenticity, was being asked of Jesus in the Gospel text today. The crowd, pressing in around Him as he walked around the temple, was skeptical. They saw this man, making hint after hint of being sent by the Father, of being God's Son, in what they considered the wrong surroundings. After all, this can't be God – He's in human flesh! Or the Messiah? This is no prince, no great warrior. Where are his palaces, his wealth, his titles? Where are his armies?

It's hard for people to believe they're seeing the real thing when it's in a place they don't expect. Years ago there was a reality show called “Undercover Boss.” The show is exactly what it sounds like – a company CEO spends a week undercover, often in disguise, at an entry-level position – causing laughs as they bumble at simple tasks their employees have down cold. At the end of the week, the boss rewards folks that do their jobs well, sometimes even offering promotions and vacations to the best workers. Other times, the undercover experience exposes bad employees. Surely, no one thought their new coworker in training was the top figure of their organization. So too, with Jesus. He did not appear extraordinary to most people for the first thirty years of His life. Sure, after His birth angels appeared to some shepherds. Three Magi came to visit bearing gifts. Mary and Joseph knew who Jesus was, and Simeon and Anna praised him when he was an infant presented at the temple. Otherwise, Jesus' growing up experience was unremarkable – son of a carpenter, in the trade himself – an ordinary guy.

And then Jesus starts this ministry, performing great and miraculous works, works unseen in the history of the world – save for from the hand of God. He's preaching and

teaching with wisdom, wisdom unseen, certainly unseen in a man not properly educated as he should be, and a man so young – and to teach with such authority! But now, as Jesus' claims about who He is move from action to words, as He starts exposing the divine. At the end, he doesn't get the reception of those Undercover Boss CEOs who are instantly recognized for who they are. He claims to be like no other man – He is one with Yahweh. He's met instead with skepticism. He's asked to show His credentials, and then they choose not to believe His story. They continue asking, "Who are you?" They are unable to believe He is like no other.

This Sunday, in addition to Mother's Day, we celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday – rejoicing in the fact that God, our Good Shepherd, cares for us often wayward sheep who need His love and care – much like a mother who will never give up on her kids. That imagery of the shepherd hits the crowd between the eyes, for they knew this was an image reserved for God. The concept of the Good Shepherd was nothing new to these people – they heard it in places like Psalm 23. Or from Ezekiel 34 – and as you listen, I want you to ask two questions – 1, are the things said here true of the Father? And 2, are these things true of Jesus, in a way that is true of no mere man: "I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so I will look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered... I will bring them out of the nations and gather them from the countries, I will pasture them in the mountains of Israel, I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, I will search for the lost and bring back the strays, I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak... You, my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, are my people and I am your God."

The question then becomes, is what Jesus says in our Gospel text true? Is he a shepherd in the way God says from this Ezekiel passage? Or do people have a right to be angry as they circle around him, trying to intimidate him, arrest Him? Jesus' response is simple. "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep." Jesus has already shown His credentials.

And we see Jesus, throughout the Gospels tending to His sheep. Yes, many ordinary, imperfect people, sinners all but otherwise faithful, "church-going" types are part of this flock. But plenty of other "church goers" are up in arms because of Jesus going out to the people

polite society often frowns upon, sneers at, writes off. In Ezekiel God goes to the nations and gathers them from around the world, other sheep not of this sheep pen – well that’s what Jesus does in the text right before our Gospel today. He engages positively with Samaritans, Greeks and Romans, bringing the promise to the whole known world. Today through His Church, it continues to the ends of the earth. He’s a Good Shepherd, here to bind up the injured and strengthen the weak. He reaches to those cast out from the community, to lepers, to people with physical infirmities, or helping people in financial hardship like widows, orphans and immigrants so often conveniently ignored.

The shepherd continues this work today, further evidence that Jesus’ claims are true. Not only is He a good shepherd, He’s THE good shepherd – so much so, that He and the Father – yes, the very Father who had spoken hundreds of years earlier of being a good shepherd to Ezekiel, who comforted David to write Psalm 23 a thousand years before – yes, Jesus and that Father are one together! Jesus is truly like no other. As God has done for thousands of years, He does today, too – He calls us wayward sheep back to Him when we run wayward in our sin. He gathers strays back to Himself, a tireless devotion of love for all people. He opens the doors to people of all nations and backgrounds and ages from conception to grave. He binds up our injuries – whether the literal ongoing care for our bodies where he preserves us every day, to aiding in remarkable healing, to promising to raise us to better, perfect bodies on the Last Day. And injuries of spirit too – forgiving us our sin. Strengthening us with His body and blood. Giving forgiveness, a gift that makes us free to try to live our lives even more powerfully as God’s hands in our world. Yes, we have a shepherd like none other!

The greatest sign of authenticity, of this Good Shepherd comes as He lays down His life for the sheep. He seals victory over death and thus guarantees this: nothing can take you or me out of His hand. You have heard His voice in your baptism. Your place is assured and promised – for your Shepherd has called you by name. Surely, we are under a Shepherd like none other. In Jesus’ name, Amen.