

I Know My Sheep and My Sheep Know Me
John 10:11-18

Dear Friends in Christ and fellow-sheep of the Good Shepherd,

For the past several weeks there has been a program advertised on what my wife calls the “soft-talking” channels, the History Channel, the Science Channel, the National Geographic Channel, the Learning Channel. It is a National Geographic program entitled, “The Story of God.”

I’m quoting from the National Geographic website:

Everyone’s favorite narrator is taking an adventure you’ll want to hear about. Morgan Freeman will host a new National Geographic series called “The Story of God.” Who is God? Where did we come from? Why does evil happen? What happens when we die? Morgan Freeman takes us on an ambitious global journey to understand how religion has evolved throughout the course of civilization, and in turn how religion has shaped the evolution of society.

“The story of God is one of the greatest mysteries and most important ideas in the world. For me, this is a personal and enduring quest to understand the divine, and I am humbled by the opportunity to take viewers along on this incredible journey,” Freeman said. “I want to know how the perception of God has changed over the centuries, and how science is changing religion. National Geographic’s unprecedented inside access will allow us to explore the global mystery behind God and religion.” Just who is God?

What a coincidence! That’s what our sermon’s about this morning. “Who is God? Where did we come from? What happens when we die?” All of these questions are answered in the words of today’s text from John chapter 10, and they are answered without “National Geographic’s unprecedented inside access.” Jesus addresses the “global mystery behind God and religion” with a very simple statement, “I Know My Sheep and My Sheep Know Me.”

From John chapter 10 we listen again to verses 14 and 15:

¹⁴ “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me-- ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father--and I lay down my life for the sheep.

Sorry, no investigation into the “changing perception of God,” no “enduring quest to understand the divine,” no study of “how religion has evolved throughout the course of civilization,” just the simple and comforting message, “I Know My Sheep and My Sheep Know Me.” Let me personalize that statement for you:

The Good Shepherd Knows You and
You Know the Good Shepherd.

Have any of you ever lived in a small town, a town where everybody knows everybody? It is impossible to be anonymous in a small town. Let me give you this example. Back in the summer of 1993, I

accepted a call to serve Grace Lutheran Church in Durand, Michigan. Durand, Michigan was a small town. Everybody knew everybody. It was impossible to be anonymous there. We learned that lesson very quickly.

The day after we unloaded the moving van, we went to the local grocery store to stock up on food. By the time we got into the check-out lane, the cart was overflowing. The lady at the register rang us up and it was then that I realized, I had forgotten the checkbook. All I had was a few dollars in my wallet. So I said, "I'm sorry, I can't pay for this. I forgot to bring my checkbook." The lady at the register smiled and said, "You're the new pastor at the Lutheran church, aren't you?" I said, "Yes," wondering how she knew since this was only our second day in town. She said, "Let me give you the total and you can just bring your check in tomorrow." The next day, when I brought my check in, that lady wasn't there, but everybody else in the store knew who I was and why I was there. That's a small town for you. You can't be anonymous in a small town.

No matter where you go, you can't be anonymous with God. "I know my sheep," Jesus says. God knows you. And that is a blessing. When Jesus says he "knows" you he's not talking about a superficial knowledge. He's talking about a deep and intimate knowledge of you and everything about you. Do you realize how well Jesus knows you? Before creation, Jesus knew your name, he knew who your parents would be, he knew what your life would be like, growing up. He knows your talents, he knows your likes and dislikes, he knows what makes you happy, and he knows what things make you afraid. Jesus knows you. The all-powerful ruler of the universe knows you better than you know yourself. This is an unfathomable blessing.

Or is it? When I read this in the Bible, there's a part of me that's a little uncomfortable, a part of me that doesn't really like this. If Jesus knows me this well, then he knows my sins. He knows not only when I say or do things that are wrong, he knows when I'm thinking bad things. Aren't there some things about you that you would rather keep private? Embarrassing things? Things that you have said or done or just thought, that you would be ashamed of if they were ever brought out into the open? Every human being has a secret life, a secret vault where we keep certain sins that we want no one to ever see. But Jesus sees. Our lives are open books to him. This doesn't sound like an unfathomable blessing. It sounds like a curse.

What does the Good Shepherd do when he sees the sins of his flock? He has every right to throw us out of his flock for all of our sins. But instead, he says this: "I lay down my life for the sheep." Do shepherds normally lay down their lives for their sheep? No. A shepherd will do the best he can to fight off any wild animals, but even a good shepherd isn't going to just lay down his life and let a wild animal kill him. Besides, what good would it do? After the wild animal kills the shepherd, there's no one there to protect the sheep.

But you have a shepherd who loves you. He sees Satan, the enemy, coming to attack the flock of sinful sheep. He steps between you and the enemy. He takes into himself all of your sins – including those secret sins, those shameful sins, and he allows Satan to kill him. He lays down his life for you, and he dies. Satan thinks he has won, and that he can attack you next. But then, Jesus rises from the dead, and that changes everything. You don't have a shepherd who's dead. You have a shepherd who's alive. You have a shepherd who's taken your sins away. Where is the proof that my sins are paid for? Where is the proof that even my secret sins are covered in his blood? Jesus has risen from the dead. He is

alive. There is our proof. God has accepted the death of the Good SHEPHERD to pay for the sins of the SHEEP. This is the greatest blessing anyone could ever bestow.

If any of you have ever been parents before, you know that one of the most frustrating things about parenting is when something is wrong with your child, and you can't fix it. Maybe you don't even know what's wrong. Is this a virus or something else? Why doesn't the medication work? What does my child need? Different medicine? Maybe surgery? Maybe therapy? You want your child to be happy and healthy, but as a parent, you don't always know what to do, or how to fix what is wrong.

What a blessing, that we have Jesus, who knows us. It's not a mystery to him, what's wrong with us. He sees all of our sins. And he knows how to fix it. That's what he did on Good Friday. And that's why he rose on Easter Sunday. "I know my sheep," Jesus says, "and my sheep know me."

"My sheep know me." Not only does the Good Shepherd know you, but you know the Good Shepherd. You know God. You don't need to participate in an investigation into the "changing perception of God." You don't need to join the "enduring quest to understand the divine." You know God. God is not a mystery to you. You never have to say to yourself, "I wonder what God is like" because he has told you what he is like, a holy and just God who is also a God of love. You have heard him speak as a God of mercy and compassion in the pages of Scripture where he says:

¹² As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered . . . ¹⁶ I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak . . . (Ezekiel 34:12,16, NIV).

What a beautiful picture of a loving, compassionate God!

God is your loving heavenly Father who has sent the Good Shepherd Jesus to lay down his life for you. What a blessing it is to know God. What a blessing to know that you are at peace with God through sins forgiven. What a blessing to know that your God has prepared a place for you in heaven. What a blessing to know that you have eternal security in the arms of the Good Shepherd through faith in him.

I have heard it said many times that Lutherans are still the best trained, the best educated in the Word of God by the time they are confirmed. You'll be able to see that for yourself in two Sundays, Confirmation Sunday. Think back to all the time you spent in Confirmation Class, studying the catechism, the six chief parts of our faith, memorizing Bible passages, writing essays or taking tests. As a result, most of you have not only known God your entire life, you have had an in-depth knowledge of God your entire adult life. What a blessing. Every day, millions of people wake up in the morning, wondering, why am I here, where did I come from, where am I going? That's not a mystery to those who are sheep of the Good Shepherd. He once said, "*Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*" (John 17:3 NIV). Knowing him and believing in him is eternal life.

We live in a world that more and more does not know the way, the truth, or the life. Is there a God or not? Just google that question and take note of all the confusion that is in our world today. Or tune in to Morgan Freeman tonight as he "explores different cultures and religions on the ultimate quest to uncover the meaning of life, who God is, and all the questions in between." No need to do that, Mr. Freeman, all the answers are here in God's Word.

What a blessing it is that, for most of us, we have known God our entire lives. What a blessing it is that, for most of us, we have been trained in the depth of the Bible's teachings. How can we ever thank God for the gift of faith and the saving knowledge that is ours?

¹⁶ I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.

There are still those who do not know their Savior. They are outside of the sheep pen and headed to eternal destruction. I'm sure that most of you even know some of those lost sheep. Maybe you are even related to a lost sheep. Who better to get the word out to them than you? Not only does the Good Shepherd know you, but you know the Good Shepherd. You know him well enough to tell others about him. You might just be the person God has in mind to share the message of salvation through faith in Jesus with one of those lost sheep. God can use you in the big round-up to bring more souls into the fold.

Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd. Not only has he laid down his life for us, he has given us his Word and Sacraments, so that we can continue to grow in our knowledge of him. May God continue to fill your life with bountiful blessings, as you follow your Good Shepherd all the way into eternity. Amen.