

Good Shepherd Sunday 2024 **Confirmation / Youth Group Lesson**

by Rev. Kelly Nieman Anderson

Scripture Lesson for the day: John 10:11-18

John 10:11-18 NRSV

[Jesus said:] ¹¹“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²The 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. ¹³The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. ¹⁴I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶I 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. ¹⁷For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸No 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.”

NOTES:

- The ELCA releases regular youth ministry lessons called “Faith Lens.” A prior lesson published in May 2017 is appropriate for use on this theme.¹
- This lesson, written specifically for use on Good Shepherd Sunday 2024, includes material previously published from a variety of sources, all available free online.²

Leader Points to Know

We can't be sure exactly what Jesus means in this scripture, or what John means by including it in his Gospel. But Lutherans understand the following:

- We belong to God. God loves us. God protects us.
- Jesus came to earth to demonstrate God's love for us, through sacrifice, generosity, and relationship.
- For ancient Israelites, sheep symbolized God's blessing and the interconnectedness of all creation. (Sheep were their life force: they provided wool, milk, meat, and currency.)
- Still today, we humans depend on animals, land, and other people for our livelihood and care.
- John 10 and Psalm 23 are not “lost sheep” passages; their metaphors include a shepherd actively leading the flock. That means that “walking through the valley of the shadow of death” and confrontations with “wolves” are part of normal life; not signs of going astray.
- Shepherds, then and now, know that their sheep will be slaughtered, and so they're essentially caring for them in order to make money. This part of the metaphor is something that Jesus reverses – he takes punishment and death on the cross in our place. Jesus is inherently different than all other shepherds or caretakers we will ever know, even the best ones!
- The Good Shepherd exemplifies generosity and sacrifice. We aren't sheep (in real life), we're people, and as people of God, we are expected to also demonstrate generosity and sacrifice for others, as a witness to God's love in our lives.

¹ <https://blogs.elca.org/faithlens/may-7-2017/>

² <https://ministrytoyouth.com/youth-group-lessons-following-jesus/> and <https://thesource4ym.com/what-do-you-hear/>

Before the lesson: *Gather all supplies as needed, based on activities chosen.*

Welcome: *Welcome all of the participants to the space.*

- Celebrate any birthdays.
- Collect offering and /or sing a song.
- Sharing highs and lows (1 good thing and 1 bad thing that happened this week)
- Optional snack

Opening Prayer:

Light a candle (or turn on flameless candle).

God's light lives in all of us. We invite God's light to shine in all of the things we named today, both good and bad and in between.

Take a deep breath in and out.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the word for "breath" and the word for "spirit" are the same word. So, I invite you to take three deep breaths with me, in and out, as we inhale God's spirit and exhale anything that distracts us from God.

Inhale God's spirit—*big inhale*. Exhale distractions—*big exhale*.

Inhale God's peace—*big inhale*. Exhale tension—*big exhale*.

Inhale God's love—*big inhale*. Exhale fear—*big exhale*.

Pause.

Let's pray. God, thank you for sending your breath into us, and thank you for shining your light in our world. Help us to reflect your light and share your spirit with all whom we meet. Amen.

Introduce the Lesson. *Say something like:*

Today's Bible story is about Jesus' love and care for us. Jesus compares people to sheep and calls himself the "good shepherd". We'll read the whole Bible story together soon. But first, we're going to practice what it's like to be a "good" shepherd and some well-loved sheep

Opening Activities: *Choose one or both of the following*



- **Good Shepherd Marshmallows**³ [Minute-to-Win-It style]. Use the fences in the printout at the end of this lesson guide. Fold the fences into a square with a little opening. Place 10 marshmallows outside of the fence. Each team has to use a straw to blow the marshmallows inside the fence during a one minute time limit. The team with the most marshmallows inside the fence wins. [This is really hard because the fence moves when you blow on the marshmallow, but it is fun. If it's too hard, then tape the fence to a plate].

³ <https://hollyshome-hollyshome-hollyshome.blogspot.com/2016/11/minute-to-win-it-new-testament-bible.html?m=1>

Opening Activities *continued*

- **Good Shepherd Relay:** Each child is a “shepherd”, and balloons are “sheep”; children are in teams, and each team is trying to get their balloon “sheep” into their own “pastures/pens”, using paper wrapping tubes or wiffle ball bats as “shepherd staffs”. After everyone has had one turn, discuss the differences in how they treated the sheep. Point out how the balloon “sheep” responded better with gentle handling & remind them that this is how Jesus guides us: with a gentle nudge. Give the teams another round to see how they do



Activity Debrief *Give students a chance to talk about what they just learned.*

Ask questions like:

- What happened during our activity?
- How did you feel during the activity?
- What have you learned through this activity?
- What can you do with your new learning? (*accept any reasonable answer*)
- I told you that today’s Bible story is about Jesus’ love and care for us. What do you think our activity had to do with Jesus’ love and care for us? (*accept any reasonable answers*)

Transition Teaching: *Connect the fun activity to the Bible Story.*

Say something like:

Playing with marshmallows, balloons, and blindfolds is pretty fun, and a little silly! In real life, taking care of ourselves, and others, can be very challenging. It’s extra tough to follow Jesus, sometimes, and even tougher to share Jesus’ love and care with others.

Introduce the Scripture *Explain a little about what you’re going to read.*

Today’s Bible story is about Jesus’ love and care for us. Jesus is explaining that real love is shown through sacrifice and generosity. We know that someone loves us when they show us their love, through sacrificial giving. Jesus gives his life for us, to show us how much God loves us.

We are like sheep, in that Jesus is our shepherd.

But we are also people, and Jesus asks us to also show love and care for other people. We show God’s love through our own sacrificial generosity.

Bible Story:

Read today’s Bible Story from John 10:11-18 OR John 10:1-21. Try reading it from a few different versions. The Message, The Living Bible, and Contemporary English Version are all good with youth.

Small Group Scripture Discussion *Discuss the Bible reading in groups of 6 or fewer.*

Ask questions similar to these:

- Why do you think that Jesus compares his followers to Sheep?
- Why do you think that Jesus calls himself the “Good Shepherd”?
- Who or what are the “hired hands”? Who or what are the “wolves”?
- How does Jesus act like a shepherd?
- What is the “good news” of this passage?
- In John’s Gospel, Jesus is compared to lots of other things (not just a shepherd). Can you remember any other images of Jesus? (examples: I am the...)

[Optional video]

This video shows what can happen when sheep are neglected, and how much sheep need shepherd’s help.

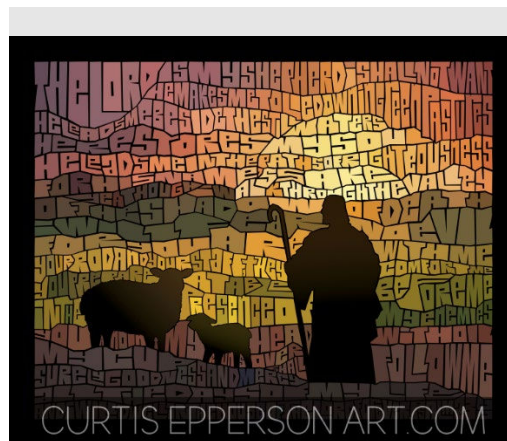
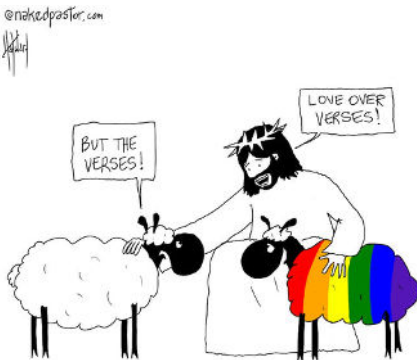
https://youtu.be/OWf_S_LhV34

(Note: LSSI did not create this video, so we cannot be responsible for ads which might appear before or during the video. For best results, preview the videos, and download prior to Sunday School to show with as few ads as possible).

Large Group Application

Show youth the following comic.

Let them think about it for about 15-30 seconds (just let the silence sit there for a few seconds!)



Ask something like:

- What do you notice in the image(s)?
- Do you think it is accurate to today’s Scripture lesson from John 10? Why or why not / how?
- When do you notice God’s care for you or others?
- When is it more challenging to notice or appreciate God’s care for you or others?
- How / when can we say “thank you” to Jesus for taking care of us?
- Who takes care of you, like a shepherd?
- Who or what do you take care of?
- Is there anything you can do to show God’s care more clearly or more often?

Optional Meditation

Individual time to think, pray, and process is important, even for ‘wiggly’ youth. Consider distributing a copy of the adult coloring image (next page) and playing this video.

Say something like:

While we listen to this next song, I invite you to follow Jesus through valleys and mountaintops. Can you remember a time when you felt someone taking good care of you? Take this time to pray to God, listen to God, and let your heart dream a little. Coloring might help your brain focus!

<https://youtu.be/IDvb1tXuRrU>

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Closing Prayer

Invite a youth to start the prayer, and another to end the prayer. Others can include prayers in the middle, either out loud or in their hearts. Or, pray out loud something like this:

God, you sent Jesus to show us what a “Good Shepherd” is, but the world of sheep and shepherds doesn’t always feel relevant to us. Still, we know what it’s like to be lost or scared or in need of help, and we thank you for always taking care of us. Forgive us for all the times when we ignored your guidance, or did not share your love with others. Please send us good human caregivers, and open our hearts to recognize you all around us. Amen.

