

St. Brendan's
 John 10:11-18
 April 26, 2026
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Ah, the sheepfold...especially at this time of the year it is muddy and stinking. The sheep hover tightly together, their fleeces dirty and frozen. They press against the stone walls to try to escape...they want to be let out to graze after being shut in all winter. But not quite yet, that is what the good shepherd knows...not quite yet...early spring weather is still too unreliable.

I know this because for years I was a shepherd to my flock of 20 sheep both here and in upstate NY. Each sheep had a name and a personality. It was my job to make sure that all these wonderful creatures were not just surviving but were thriving.

Usually, this time of year, most of the ewes were pregnant...let them out too early and they could give birth to tiny lambs that might freeze... In fact, if you were to ask my son, Alexander, he could tell you about the time we had baby lambs in the house for several weeks...

One April, a pregnant ewe found a way to escape our sheepfold and run off into the woods. We realized she was missing and went to look for her. We found her with not one but three tiny lambs whom we scooped up and took back to the house where they lived inside with us until the weather warmed up...As Alexander tells it, they are really cute for the first week or so but then they begin to chew up everything they can find, books, shoes, kleenex...I can't say we laid down our lives for these little ones but we did our best!

I can assure you that when Jesus says, "*I know my own and my own know me...*" he is spot on...that is to say, if the sheep heard my voice or Alexander's voice they would come running. If any of you called them, trust me they wouldn't move a muscle.

During John's gospel, Jesus will claim to be a gate, a shepherd, a loaf of bread, a road, a light, a grapevine and a resurrection. There are about 23 times that Jesus uses the "I AM" referring back to the Divine name we first read in Exodus (Exodus 3:14) when Moses wants to know who he should tell the Israelites are calling them to leave Egypt and God answers, "*I AM WHO I AM.*"

C.S. Lewis observed that a man who claimed to be all of the above is either the single most important person you might ever meet or a man as nuts as someone who walks around claiming to be a poached egg.

Most of us don't have the experience of raising sheep in this modern world, but I have had it and there is not a single other passage in the Bible that has brought me closer to Jesus than this one. You see because I knew what it meant to be a good shepherd. This is when I guess my heart got broken into because I wanted to know Jesus. I found a wonderful spiritual director who suggested I try the Ignatian Exercises. For those not familiar with the Exercises, they were devised by St. Ignatius of Loyola to discern God's will for your life and deepen your friendship

with Jesus. For 9 months, through prayers and meditations, I learned to actively engage Scripture. At the end of that time, I began my journey towards ordination to the priesthood.

The love that I felt for my sheep, the responsibility of feeding and caring for them, of watching for those wolves or in my case, the coyotes, never ended. Most nights, I still listen for the howl of the coyote before I can sleep. I know how cared for, how protected, how loved Jesus makes me feel.

Most of us clergy have preached on this passage more times than we can count, and you might wonder what more is there to say. But as always seems to happen for me, something new rose out of the text. The verses that struck me so deeply at this time when our world feels so polarized and confused were these... *“I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. For there will be one flock, one shepherd.”* Jesus hasn't forgotten about those who may not have had the opportunity to hear his voice, who haven't yet had their hearts and their lives broken open to receive his love. He assures us that they will not be left behind because he tells us that he is willing to go after them, to gather us all into him.

Jesus wants to make clear that his life didn't end on the cross. And here's what else I know. It takes time and patience and a willingness to wait for the sheep who do not know your voice to trust it enough to come when you call. He will continue to try to bring this world together, continue to show us what love really looks like, continue to call us until we all become one flock.

Today as the church celebrates the season of Creation, what a gift the Lectionary gives us to plant us in the sheepfold... to take the time to hold precious the land that offers life to the sheep. Can we imagine the earthy scent of the deep mud as we look out on the fields of grass greening, surrounded by trees about to burst their buds and the wildflowers beginning to spread such wild color. Listen and we might be able to hear the sheep's teeth tearing at the fresh grass. It's a moment to realize how important it is to protect the earth for all creatures great and small.

We just read Psalm 23, *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.* Certainly, one of the most enduring themes in Scripture is God as our shepherd and now we have God's son as our shepherd. To be his followers we simply need to enter the gate of the sheepfold. Jesus promises to care for us, to feed us. He will protect us from the coyotes and wolves. John wants us to know this Jesus is willing to lay down his life for the sheep God has given him.

Jesus also makes something else clear. It is not up to us to call this flock together because it is God through the Holy Spirit who will bring this flock together. I ask you, what will it take for us to open our hearts, to enter through that gate, to trust that Jesus is truly our good shepherd and will go after us no matter where we find ourselves? Amen