

Can you believe it's been three weeks already since Easter? Just two weeks to go until Mother's Day, so if you are like me, it's time to get your flower orders ready! And of course, today is Confirmation Sunday! Later this morning thirteen bright, knowledgeable, and well-mannered eighth graders will come forward and say "Yes!" to the promises God first gave to them in Holy Baptism. They are ready to take the next step and become communicant members of our congregation. I am grateful to God for all of them. There are so many wonderful Sundays of celebration this time of year; special ways to give thanks to God for His countless gifts to us.

Today is also a special Sunday for another reason. In fact, it's one of my favorites of the church year: Good Shepherd Sunday. The vivid, meaningful, and comforting passages from God's Word along with the beautiful hymns picture the Lord Jesus as our Good Shepherd, who cares and loves us so much, His dear sheep.

You may have noticed that the theme of this morning's sermon is ***"Blessings from the Good Shepherd."*** There are so many of those blessings we could focus, but I'd like to lift up for you just two of those

today. We find them in verses 14 and 15 of our Gospel reading where Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep." The first blessing we find is that the Good Shepherd knows **you**. The second is that **you** know the Good Shepherd.

One thing everyone who has ever lived in a small town knows is that you cannot remain anonymous. No matter where you go in town, someone is bound to know you, or at least recognize you. You can't just be anonymous. If you're not sure if the town you grew up in really qualifies as a small town, here is a list I have put together, after doing a little research, of the top seven ways to know you're from a small town:

- Number 7: Your schoolteachers remember when they taught your parents.
- Number 6: Your teachers call you by your older siblings' names.
- Number 5: You can name everyone you graduated high school with.
- Number 4: When you're driving in town, you don't use turn signals because everyone knows where you're going anyway.

And now for the top three signs you are from a small town:

-Number 3: You call a wrong number and the person on the other end supplies you with the correct one.

-Number 2: Everyone knows all the news before it's published; people just read the hometown paper to see if the reporters got the story right.

-And the number one way to tell if you're from a small town is:

The local phone book has only one yellow page.

Yes, one thing *is* for sure though, in a small town you cannot remain anonymous even if it's 2021 and you're wearing a covid mask.

The truth is though, no matter where you go in life, whether you find yourself in a "little-bitty town or a big ol' city", you can't remain anonymous *with God*. "I *know* my sheep," Jesus says. God knows you. And that's a blessing. The word "know" in the Bible has this idea of a deep intimate knowledge of everything about you (Kittel- A personal relationship , vol. 1, p.711). Do you realize how *well* Jesus knows you? Before He created the world, God knew your name. He knew when you would be born. He knew who your parents would be, what your life would be like growing up. He

knows what you're good at, what things make you happy, and what things make you afraid. Jesus knows you. This is blessing number one.

But is it *really* a blessing? If Jesus knows us this well, then He knows our sins. Aren't there 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 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 a blessing – it sounds more like a curse.

What does the Good Shepherd do when He sees the sins of His sheep? He has every reason and right to kick us out of His flock for all of our sins. But instead, He says this: "I lay down my life for the sheep."

Is that a normal practice, for a shepherd to be willing to die in order to save for their sheep? No. A shepherd will do the best he can to fight off any wild animals, but even a highly dedicated shepherd isn't going to allow himself to be mauled to death in order to save a sheep or two.

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 the wolf coming to attack the flock filled with sin. The wolf is Satan. Jesus steps between you and that ferocious wolf. 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. 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 shame is gone? Where is the evidence that my secret sins are gone? Where is the proof, that my embarrassment is gone? Jesus has risen from the dead – He's alive – there's your proof. There's the biggest blessing that anyone could ever receive.

If you're a parent, you know that one of the most frustrating things about parenting is when something is wrong with your child's health, but you can't fix it. Maybe you don't even know what's wrong – is it a virus?

Why doesn't the medication work? What does my child need? Different medicine? Maybe a different diet? Surgery? Therapy? You know something is wrong, and you love your child - 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 it.

What a blessing it is that we have Jesus, Who knows us. It's not a mystery to Him as to 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."

Did you catch that other blessing that Jesus mentioned at the end of that sentence? "My sheep know me." You know God – He's not a mystery to you. You never have to say to yourself, "I wonder what God is like?" because you have seen God. You have heard Him speak. You have watched Him in action. Your God is Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd. What a blessing – to know God!

Every day, millions of people go through their day wondering – “Why am I here, what’s my purpose, what will happen after I die?” That’s not a mystery to us who stay close to the Good Shepherd.

We live in a world that doesn’t 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 exists in our world today. But the children in our Sunday school aren’t confused. The children of our Lutheran Day School aren’t confused. Our 13 confirmands this morning aren’t confused – they know God. “Anyone who has seen me, has seen the Father,” Jesus says. As you get older, you start to wonder more, “What exactly happens after I die? Is there a heaven? Is there a Judgment?” For you who spend your life sticking close to your Good Shepherd Jesus through His Word and Sacraments, (those are the ways He shepherds us on this side of heaven), you’re not confused about these things at all. You know your Good Shepherd and your Good Shepherd knows you.

Have you ever heard the phrase: “It’s not what you know, but who you know”? In many ways, that’s how our world works. It’s not what you

know, it's who you know that can help you get your first big job, or get you a good deal on a car or other big purchase Who do you know, that is extremely powerful, Who controls everything, Who loves you, Who is preparing a place for you and will someday come back? Who do you know – that promises you that you can ask anything – and He will do it, according to His wisdom and love? You know Jesus, the Good Shepherd. What a blessing that is! You know the Good Shepherd **and** the Good Shepherd knows you.

And so today, on this Good Shepherd Sunday, let's recommit ourselves to following Jesus, as the Confirmands will promise to do today. Let's follow our Good Shepherd because He knows us. He laid down His life for us. He took it back up again. He has given us His Word and Sacraments, so that we will always know Him. May God fill your life with blessings, as you follow your Good Shepherd all the way into eternity where you will dwell in the house of the Lord forever! Amen.

Rev. Dan Welch Easter 4 4-25-21 10:30 Text- John 10: 11-18

Lauren Betcher, Lauren Brinkmann, Seth Mathews, Maxx Neubarth, Autumn Schuch, Tyler Templin, Hayden Witthus, Joseph Sullivan, Carter Petron, Brayden Mathwig, Laira Busse, Grace Brickzen, and Colin Bernstein: You made it! Well, just about made it, anyway. In a few more minutes you, will publicly confirm your faith in your Lord Jesus and become communicant members of First Lutheran Church. We are all so happy for you and proud. You have been a great class. I thank God for you and the honor it's been to be your catechism teacher this past year, and to ***continue to be*** your pastor.

In a few moments you will have reached the goal of your instruction with Confirmation, but your journey in faith is far from over! The same goes for me and everyone else here this morning. God's command in 2 Peter 3:18 to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" lets us know there is always more to learn about God and His plan for our lives. What's more, there are always ***more*** blessings to receive from Him. All Christians, of all ages are commanded to keep on

growing in Christ until the day of His return. So, it's my heartfelt prayer that each of you remain faithful to your Lord who loves you so much and keep on worshiping Him, keep receiving His gifts and blessings from Him here, and keep on reading and growing His Word. You will be amazed the places the Lord will take you in your life. Yes, your Lord Jesus has made a promise to you, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5).

And what better way of picturing that kind of care and love for you today than in the words of our assigned Gospel reading for this Good Shepherd Sunday!

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And, Lauren Betcher, Lauren Brinkmann, Seth Mathews, Maxx Neubarth, Autumn Schuch, Tyler Templin, Hayden Witthus, Joseph Sullivan, Carter Petron, Brayden Mathwig, Laira Busse, Grace Brickzen, and Colin Bernstein: on this your Confirmation Day, may God fill your life especially with many blessings, as you follow your Good Shepherd all the way into eternity where you will dwell in the house of the Lord forever!

Amen.