

**- Saint John's Pulpit (April 25, Fourth Sunday of Easter)
- "One Flock under One Shepherd" John 10:11-18**

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

Shepherds, who are they?

Among church jargons, the word 'shepherd' might be one of the best words to depict God. King, father, and shepherd... all these terms present God our Father in common. For me, it is not so strange to understand these multiple vocabularies to signify God in common, because in Eastern Asian culture, people regard three entities –king, father, and teacher as the same value, thereby get high respect from people.

However, when it comes to the word 'shepherd', a careful examination of all evidence from the Bible makes us understand that why God should be our shepherd more clearly.

In Palestine, shepherds are thoroughly responsible for their sheep no matter how. Not only protect sheep, but also shepherds should prove that any damage on sheep was not from their fault. In Amos 3:12,

12 Thus says the LORD: As the shepherd rescues from the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear, so shall the people of Israel who live in Samaria be rescued, with the corner of a couch and part of a bed. Amos 3:12 NRSV

Back to the law of Moses, we can see a special regulation which helps us understand what shepherds' life was.

13 If it was mangled by beasts, let it be brought as evidence; restitution shall not be made for the mangled remains. Exodus 22:13 NRSV

Missing sheep? It was almost impossible. Shepherds should bring their lost sheep and if not, they were asked to bring a part of their body in case of being killed by beasts of prey. Just like what the U.S. Government did to all U.S. military, shepherds should find their sheep, bring them home, and keep them safe.

King David was a typical example to know about shepherds. In 1 Samuel 17:34-36,

34 But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and whenever a lion or a bear came, and took a lamb from the flock, 35 I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth; and if it turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down, and kill it. 36 Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, since he has defied the armies of the living God." 1 Samuel 17:34-36 NRSV

Knowing that shepherds' social status was not high in the society, but the fact that David became the second king of Israel became a positive sign for shepherds to break a glass ceiling!

I am the Good Shepherd.

In the story today, Jesus identify himself as the good shepherd a couple of times.

11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. John 10:11 NRSV

14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. John 10:14-15 NRSV

With all our knowledge of shepherd in Palestine, becoming the good shepherd... is the greatest promise for our salvation from Jesus. Now, Jesus guarantees to become a shepherd for us, plus become the GOOD shepherd! It means that Jesus takes care of all we need whether in our good days and bad days. Plus, Jesus is speaking that he is ready to sacrifice himself for us!

Indeed, this relation seems to be strange or odd in terms of human relationships. Mostly, human relation is good when all things are good. However, we all things are bad, people can't keep their relationship well.

In my home country, the next year is a year of a presidential election. I am very sorry to see a sign of lame-duck from the current president when people or his political colleagues turn their back from him. However, the relationship between shepherd and sheep is not like what we see from the world, period!

There will be one flock, one shepherd.

As we discussed, Jesus promised to become the Good shepherd for all of us. If we listen to his voice, follow his direction, and know him intimately, we might think that we are qualified to become his sheep. However, in this story, Jesus extends his invitation to others who are not in faith boundary. Let me read John 10:16 again.

¹⁶ I 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. John 10:16 NRSV

Basically, other sheep in this verse means Gentiles. So, Jesus wants to be the good shepherd for both Jews and Gentiles. However, this verse gives lots of things to consider, especially these days. Why? From this verse, we can find a key to overcome social issues we face these days. Not by human standards, but by Jesus' graceful invitation, Jesus says that all people will be one flock under one shepherd.

With this verse, you may remember what Jesus said when he commissioned his disciples which put in Matthew 10:5-6.

⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, ⁶ but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Matthew 10:5-6 NRSV

Considering that the Book of Matthew shows Jewish-centered perspectives, also there was a time gap between Matthew and John, we can understand

that the primary concern for the Christian mission was to evangelize Jews, and then moved to the Gentiles. However, the final goal from Jesus is evidently shepherding all sheep under his protection! Simply speaking, Jesus' motto was one flock, one shepherd!

So, one serious question needs to be raised up. How could we all be one flock under one shepherd? There are many Christians in the world or in our country. Why do we see exclusivism, hate crime, and blaming one another, even among Christians? This is a very difficult question. However, it might be very simple. In verse 16, Jesus says, "I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice."

In many cases, we believe that we can choose whom we should bring or invite. Or we expect that others should listen to us. However, in this verse, sheep have no authority or right to bring other sheep! It is totally up to their shepherd's decision. A big irony is this. God showed His 'unconditional' love, but our love is 'conditional' sometimes! What we need to do is to listen to Jesus, and make one flock under our shepherd, Jesus.

Many things around us show that we have a long way to become one flock, one shepherd. However, as long as we try to know Jesus more and more, and listen to his voice more clearly, we get to know what God wants us to do here and now. It is not a matter of our choice, but a matter of His choice.

¹⁶ You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. ¹⁷ I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another. John 15:16-17 NRSV

We pray that our world is full of Christian love. To make our prayer real, the most urgent task for all Christians is to become one flock under one shepherd. Of course, we are all different. But that difference never separates us from the love of Christ who is our Good Shepherd.

³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written:

*"For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."*

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. Romans 8:35-37 NIV