

Sermon Notes: April 26, 2026

Focus: The Good Shepherd, sheep, and sheepdogs

[Lectionary Readings](#)

Every year, the fourth Sunday of Easter is Shepherd Sunday aka Good Shepherd Sunday. In the Gospels, Jesus calls himself the “Good Shepherd.” That’s a little hidden today, because in John 10:1–10, he calls himself “the gate for the sheep.” But read verse 11 and he names it directly: “I am the Good Shepherd.” Aside from “good” being, well, good, what does that actually mean?

It helps to step back and consider the whole world of sheep-raising. This wasn’t abstract for the Bible; it was everyday life. And it opens three spiritual values: dependence (sheep), responsiveness (sheepdogs), and stewardship (the shepherd).

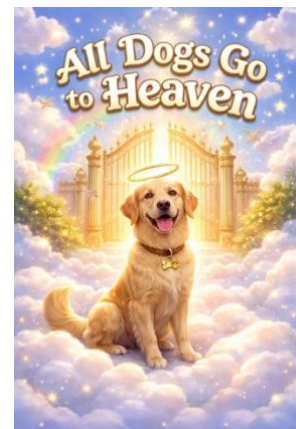
Dependence It’s easy for us to hear “sheep” as an insult. We even say “sheeple” to mean people who can’t think for themselves. But that’s not how the Bible uses the image. Sheep require constant guidance for grazing, for water, for protection. Biblical writers use that reality to describe human beings as dependent on God, not intellectually deficient. Dependence on God takes courage. Not stupidity.

Responsiveness Now, I want to bring in the silent partner: sheepdogs. This is a bit of a stretch, since Scripture doesn’t think very highly of dogs. I’ll admit, that’s disappointing. The Bible does not love dogs the way yoga teachers, Trader Joe’s shoppers, and I do. Jesus was definitely *not* a dog apologist.

Still, if sheep represent dependence, sheepdogs represent responsiveness. They listen, they act, they move between shepherd and flock. They don’t replace the shepherd, but they participate in the work.

Stewardship A good shepherd isn’t just managing sheep. A good shepherd cares for an entire system: the sheep, the dogs, the land, the water. Jesus as the Good Shepherd does the same. He cares for those who are pushed around. He challenges those who are supposed to lead but don’t. He confronts those who exploit their power. He loves the broken, pushes the powerful, and holds the whole system accountable. That’s what “good” looks like.

Responsiveness: Not everyone loves dogs The ancients did NOT think all dogs go to heaven, but I know they are wrong. Despite the bad press, I think the sheepdog metaphor is good for us because we can imagine ourselves not just being dependent and herded around from feed trough to water source and back to the sheep pin. We can respond in faith to the shepherd’s call.



Dogs and Sheepdogs Biblical references (not great)

- *Matthew 7:6* “Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.
- *Proverbs 26:11* Like a dog that returns to his vomit is a fool who repeats his folly.
- *Revelation 22:15* Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.
- *Job 30:1* “But now they make sport of me, those who are younger than I, whose fathers I would have disdained to set with the (*sheep*) dogs of my flock. (*my word added based on other translations*)

Think how much harder life would be for shepherds without sheepdogs. Sheepdogs move sheep in and out of pasture. This sheepdog video is a demonstration of a collie doing the herding work. The first three minutes get the point across. I think it's extremely cool to watch a well-trained dog work. It looks a lot like dancing <https://youtu.be/bpjP3mxv21s>. This guy in the link is Bob Hinson and I will show another very short video in church by “Sean the Sheepman.”

Dependence: Sheep Despite a dim view of dogs, the Bible loves to talk about sheep. Depending on how loosely define a sheep reference, biblical verses clock in at about 400 verses. Sheep were a pillar of the economy in the Ancient Near East. Sheep were:

- A metaphor for how (King) David the shepherd would lead the sheep (the people of Judah/Israel)
- King Solomon sacrificed football fields worth of sheep for the consecration of the Temple. They were signs of his incredible success AND the hubris of his excess.
- The lamb was sacrificed to prevent their firstborn in Egypt from dying.
- Jesus is the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep and the sheepgate.

Stewardship: Sanctuary and green pastures God, the Good Shepherd, wants to feed us (like sheep) in greener pastures. God leads in and out of the pasture (like a sheepdog). We're sheepdogs who delight in learning the Shepherd's voice that calls out for green pasture and restful love. We're sheep who know that we will arrive back in the barn when the time is right.

May we tune our ears to the Shepherd's voice; trust the care the Shepherd has for the whole. May we model our lives to be more like the Good Shepherd where we tend to the whole and individual needs of our communities.

Peace, Todd