Text: John 10:11-18

**Introduction**

There are seven “I Am” statements in the Gospel according to John. John likes using groups of sevens. In Revelation you’ve got the letters to the seven churches. You’ve got seven seals, and trumpets and censors. The Gospel can be outlined around seven signs. John uses that word signs where the other gospels use miracles or works of power. Another group of seven is these “I Am” statements. When you pay attention to the sevens I think you get an idea of what is different about John. He is circular. He ponders something, moves on and then comes back to it. He’s layered. Those sevens might be like a round – Row Row Row your boat….and then the next group….and the next. Everyone is singing the same lines, but it’s the interactions that make the experience something more.

And sometimes within one saying, Jesus will repeat the saying. The repetition will layer. For example in John 6 Jesus says four times roughly “I Am the Bread of life.” And each time adds something or moves what he is talking about slightly.

Text/Christological

In our Gospel text today Jesus says “I Am the Good Shepherd” twice. And after each statement he enlarges and fills out what he means. And it is worth first establishing each part on its own and then comparing.

After the first “I Am the good shepherd” the central comparison is between the owner and the hired man. And the comparison is straightforward and something that we can all relate to. If we own something, even more if the thing that we own is somehow entwined with our living and identity, we care a lot more about that object. Try borrowing the tools of professional mechanic. Try borrowing the books of a scholar. Try borrowing the children of parents. They might let them out, but certainly not to strangers. And there will probably be all kinds of restrictions and care taking and angst. These things are life and death.

The comparison is to the hired man. And it is not that the hired man might not be solid. The hired man might be completely conscientious, but if situations rise to life and death, you can’t expect the hired man to risk his life. No reasonable person would expect that person to risk their life. It is the owners responsibility either to provide the safety of fenced in area or overwhelming firepower – like a shotgun – if you expect the hired man to stay with the sheep in the face of the wolf.

But the point of this comparison isn’t to talk about what the hired man lacks. “The hired man cares nothing for the sheep.” True. He cares about the money he is being paid. And he’s going to do the job to the level expected by that contract. The point of the comparison is what God – what Jesus – is like toward us. He created us. He owns us. And He acts toward us like that owner. Our welfare is meaningful to God’s identity. When things rise to life and death, God will remain. “I am the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep.”

The first time through this is about who God is and how he acts. Our welfare is life and death to him.

The secont time through the emphasis moves slightly. The Good Shepherd still “lays down his life” but the strong point here is one of mission and purpose.

“I know my own and my own know me.” This is not a God who is an absentee owner or passive investor or hands off person. I know my own and my own know me. This is a God who both knows, and allows himself to be known.

And I think under that idea of a God who knows our reading gives us some specific ways or things God knows. He knows what it is like to be weak and mortal. “I lay down my life.” He knows what it is to be under authority. “This charge I have received from my Father.” He knows what it is like to be lost. “I have other sheep not of this fold. I must bring them.” The Good Shepherd is one who can completely understand the sheep. And we have such a Good Shepherd in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The creator and owner of the sheep willingly took on the life of the sheep. “I know my own.”

But maybe even more importantly “my own know me.” In Jesus we have a God who has revealed himself. No longer the unseen God Almighty in pillars of cloud and fire. No longer the God of power and might who with a mighty arm sends plague and destruction. Not an unspeaking idol who never the less demands sacrifice. Not even the eternal mystery of Job’s whirlwind who refuses to answer. “Who is this who darkens my council with words without knowledge.” The hidden God is all His forms. “My own know me.” Jesus came to perfectly reveal the Father. In Jesus we see the heart of the Father for his creation. He would not see the sinner die. He would not see his creation remain broken and lost. “I must bring them also, they will listen to my voice.” In word and deed, in suffering, death and resurrection, God has made himself known to us. He holds out his hands and his side allowing us to touch and know.

“I know my own, and my own know me.” The Good Shepherd is one of purpose. That we might know and be known.

And the method of that knowing and being know is the mission. “They will listen to my voice. There will be one flock and one shepherd.” Another of the I AM saying is “I AM the way, the truth and the life.” Jesus came not as a way. Jesus isn’t just one god among many. He didn’t come to establish one hill among many that it possible to ascend to god. Like the Samaritan woman contrasting Mt. Zion with Mt. Gerazim. Or any of the other mountains that are held up today. Jesus came that we might know the voice of God, and his sheep will listen to his voice. And there will be one flock and one shepherd.

The Good Shepherd has walked and cleared the way we must all go, should we walk past death. And this Good Shepherd deals with life and death situations. He is not a hired man. That is the charge the Jesus received from his father. And that is what he made known to us, the sheep that hear his voice.

**Moral**

We are known and we know. We have a shepherd who has walked the path we go. That doesn’t change the reality. We walk in the midst of wolves. The devil would be glad to convince you that you don’t know God. Did he really say those things? Is that really the voice of God calling you?

The world would just love to scare you away from that path. Just be the hired man. Take the money and run. That path is tough. Take what you can get now. If God is so good, he won’t do anything later. Join this flock. The sinners are much more fun.

And even our own flesh might simply fear being known. There is no way I’m showing my scars. And we get scattered.

The Good Shepherd calls. The sheep listen to his voice.

**Eschatological**

Because this is about life and death. The hired men are long gone.

This is not about temporal life, but about eternal life. These wolves are not the momentary afflictions of a material world. These are those who want to destroy body and soul.

The Good Shepherd is here not to give you some temporal good fortune. The Good Shepherd is here to make sure you dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

The Good Shepherd is here to claim all his own for eternal life. Amen.