

The Church of the Transfiguration  
Fourth Sunday of Easter  
John 10:11-18

## My Own Know Me

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Today is the Fourth Sunday of Easter, which is also known as Good Shepherd Sunday. On this day, we reflect upon Jesus as our Good Shepherd – a shepherd who loves us so much that he is willing to lay down his life for us.

The image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd is an ancient one. Some of the oldest depictions of Jesus in early Christian art show him as the Good Shepherd. One common image shows Jesus as a young shepherd carrying a lamb over his shoulders. This image appears in the Roman catacombs as well as in the ancient baptistries.

And, as the cover of our bulletin shows, we have this exact image of the Good Shepherd right here at Transfiguration – over there, just to the right of the organ. I invite you to check out the statue after mass today.

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I'm always quite moved whenever I hear today's gospel passage. In the reading, Jesus makes a distinction between himself and the hired hand. The hired hand only cares about the sheep because he is paid. But unlike the hired hand – who runs away at the first sign of danger – the Good Shepherd is willing to lay down his own life for his sheep.

This is, of course, a reference to the crucifixion, during which Jesus was tortured and executed on the cross so that we could have eternal life. Even though Jesus was of one substance with God the Father almighty, Jesus willingly emptied himself of that power on the cross. Jesus took on death so that we could have eternal life.

So why is the Good Shepherd willing to sacrifice himself for his flock? Well, in today's gospel reading Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd. *I know my own and my own know me.*" In other words, Jesus is willing to lay down his life because he knows us, and we know him.

Here, Jesus is not just talking about some kind of abstract, intellectualized knowledge. Rather, Jesus is talking about the kind of intimate and deep knowledge that can only be obtained through a loving and caring relationship.

I think of the tender relationship described in today's psalm, Psalm 23, in which the psalmist speaks of the shepherd who leads him beside still waters and protects him from danger. "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death," the psalmist says, "I shall fear no evil; for you are with me." A loving and caring relationship indeed.

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Many of you know that Michael and I have a dog who we love very much. Her name is Chartres, she's a Bichon Frise (a little white fluffy dog), and we've had her ever since she was only a few months old. It's hard to believe, but Chartres is now 14, which is pretty old in dog years. (If you multiply 14 by 7, you get 98!)

Chartres is definitely showing her age. She's developed cataracts, and so she'll bump into things from time to time – especially when it's dark. She doesn't hear very well any more. Chartres used to bark fiercely at the first sign of any noise outside of our front door. But now she doesn't even hear the door opening unless she's right next to it. And she sleeps a lot – especially since she gets pretty tired after her walks.

But Chartres still has her sense of smell, and that's how she knows us. Whenever we come home, she'll walk slowly towards us and sniff our shoes and pants. We can tell the exact moment when she recognizes us. Like a puppy, her tail starts wagging quickly and she starts to move and jump with excitement. Just as the Good Shepherd's flock knows him, Chartres knows us. We have, after all, been a pack together for over 14 years.

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So how do we become a part of the Good Shepherd's flock? How do we come to know Jesus in the same way that the Good Shepherd's flock knows him – or how Chartres instinctively knows Michael and me?

It's baptism. The sacrament of Holy Baptism is much more than just a ceremony, a social event, or a family tradition. Rather, baptism is an outward sign of the inward grace that welcomes us into Jesus' flock and makes us members of the Body of Christ.

But baptism is even more than just a rite of initiation. Baptism is forever. In the words of the baptismal rite: “[Y]ou are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own forever.” You are marked as Christ's own forever.

Once you are baptized, an indelible bond is created between you and Jesus Christ – as well as with the wider family that is the Body of Christ. Once you are baptized, that relationship can never be taken away from you. And once you are baptized, you come to know the Good Shepherd in the same way in which he knows you.

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In a few moments we will renew our baptismal vows, and we will bear witness to the baptism of Luca Yeefung Ingriselli-Moy. As you promise to support Luca in his life in Christ, I invite you to reflect upon your own baptism and how you have come to know Jesus the Good Shepherd in your own life.

Let us give thanks today for the gift of baptism and for the grace of the Good Shepherd. “I am the good shepherd,” Jesus says. “I know my own and my own know me.”