

Read: John 10:1-10

The Sheep in the Ditch

John 10:3b,4

[The shepherd] calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Recently, there was a popular video clip online of a sheep stuck in a narrow ditch. A man struggled to pull the sheep out. He was practically laying on the ground, yanking and tugging at the sheep's legs. He gave a final tug, and the sheep was free! The sheep bounded off, but seconds later, took a flying leap and... got stuck again. Ugh! What a challenge that shepherd had to take care of that sheep.

In God's Word today, Jesus compares himself to a shepherd. Shepherds have difficult jobs. They have to keep the sheep safe on dangerous, rocky ground. A shepherd has to protect the sheep from wild animals looking for a free meal. He has to find them enough food and water in areas that may be very dry and bare. But that's the job of a shepherd: to lead and feed sheep so they follow him.

If Jesus is the shepherd, what does that make us? We are the sheep, maybe like that one stuck in the ditch. We are powerless. We cannot save ourselves. We need someone to rescue us, keep us safe, and provide for us. The shepherd needs to lead us to safe pastures. He sometimes even has to protect us from ourselves!

Jesus truly is our Good Shepherd; he calls us by name. Luther's Catechism says "He has called us by the Gospel." The Gospel, in Word and sacrament is how God reaches out to us, creating faith in our hearts. Trusting his Word, we hear his voice and follow him. We are closely connected to our shepherd.

Can you think of times that Jesus has kept you safe in a dangerous situation? You might think of a close call on a busy interstate, a bumpy plane ride, a time you were really, really sick and it scared you. Can you even imagine all the ways that Jesus kept you safe when you didn't know it?

Every day, Jesus our Good Shepherd provides for us—our favorite foods, a cozy bed, our favorite stuffed animal. They all remind us of the tender love and care of the Good Shepherd.

Don't be ashamed to think of yourself as a sheep in the ditch. It means you have a shepherd who is always ready and willing to pull you out!

The questions below are to help families discuss this devotion. The questions are divided by age group as suggestions, but anyone could reflect on any of the questions as they desire.

Questions for the Younger Children

- In today's devotion, who is the Good Shepherd? Who is the sheep?
- Share one of your favorite things that the Good Shepherd has given you.

Questions for Elementary Age Children

- If you are like a sheep, what gets you into trouble the most?
- Remember a time when Jesus was like a shepherd to you. How did he rescue you? Provide for you? Lead you?

Questions for Middle School and Above

- Can you think of any hymns that compare Jesus to a shepherd? Or us to sheep?
- Before you jump in and get stuck, identify a "ditch" that is dangerous in your life. Then, identify a way you can stay ten steps away from it with your Shepherd's help.

Closing Prayer:

The King of love my shepherd is, whose goodness fails me never;
I nothing lack if I am his, and he is mine forever. Amen.
(*Christian Worship* 552:1)