

**Rev. Mike Cole**  
**Providence Presbyterian Church**  
**Fourth Sunday of Easter**  
**April 26, 2026**  
**Psalm 23: John 10:1-11**

**"The God Shepherd"**

Mel, Greg, Tex and Mike. We were an odd foursome, growing up in the suburbs of Houston. Mel was the oldest, about three years older than me. He was a schemer and a planner. You know the type who was always thinking ahead to the next project (or trouble) he could lead us into. Greg and Tex were cousins, but that's where the similarity stopped. Greg was a tall, lanky transplant from New York, who was always on the move. Tex was short, athletic and very likeable. Then there was me. I was the youngest of the bunch, neither as athletic as Tex, as motivated as Greg or as conniving as Mel, but somehow I fit in.

We had the greatest times together after school and through the dog days of summer, building forts, playing football, baseball and basketball. We each had our own character and perspective about everything. For instance, one day there was a hit and run accident in which a smaller kid in our neighborhood was hurt, but not too badly. We were all four on the scene in an instant. Mel immediately began planning how to track down the driver. Greg frantically searched for the boy's parents. Tex ran as fast as he could to call for an ambulance. And I stayed with the boy on the side of the street tending to his wounds as best as I could. Each of our four responses was different but each was necessary.

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were an odd foursome also. They had very different interests and perspectives when they wrote their account of the life and teachings of Jesus. Matthew and John were eye and ear witnesses. Mark and Luke relied on the first-hand accounts of others. Matthew wrote from a Jewish perspective and was none too keen on the Pharisees. Mark wrote with a sense of immediacy, as if there were no time to waste on details and literary niceties. Luke wrote with poetry, symmetry and great attention to detail. John focused on incidents not reported by the others and zeroed in on the mysterious and more puzzling aspects of Jesus' teaching.

Today's lesson in chapter ten is a good example of John's writings. The episode seems straightforward enough until we read it carefully. This is the beginning of Jesus's references to himself as the good shepherd. But that's not all he says about himself in chapter ten.

Listen to the story as Eugene Petersen translates it and see how Jesus refers to himself. "Let me set this before you as plainly as I can. If a person climbs over or through the fence of a sheep pen instead of going through the gate, you know he's up to no good - a sheep

rustler! The shepherd walks right up to the gate. The gatekeeper opens the gate to him and the sheep recognize his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he gets them all out, he leads them and they follow because they are familiar with his voice. They won't follow a stranger's voice but will scatter because they are used to the sound of it." Thus far, Jesus refers to himself as the shepherd. That's an understandable image with which we are familiar. But listen as he continues to teach them about himself.

The Gospel of John continues, "Jesus told this simple story, but they had no idea what he was talking about. So he tried again. 'I'll be explicit, then. I am the Gate for the sheep. All those others are up to no good - sheep stealers, every one of them. But the sheep didn't listen to them. I am the Gate. Anyone who goes through me will be cared for - will freely go in and out, and find pasture. A thief is only there to steal and kill and destroy. I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of.'"

Now Jesus has shifted the image of himself from the shepherd to the Gate, which means that now he is both the shepherd who cares for the sheep and the gate through which the sheep pass into safety. Jesus is mixing metaphors and mixing us up. How can that be?

There is a very simple explanation once we learn that the middle eastern sheep pen was usually a rock enclosure with one narrow opening. Once a shepherd had gotten all his sheep inside the sheep pen, it was customary for the shepherd to lay down across the opening, thus, becoming the gate of the sheep pen. Jesus is both the shepherd and the gate. Jesus is the one who cares for his sheep and protects them from harm. Jesus is the one who knows them by name and allows them into the sheep pen. Jesus is the one who tends their needs and watches over them. Jesus is the one who leads his sheep out when they should be going out and keeps his sheep from going out when they should be staying in. Jesus is both the shepherd and the gate at the same time.

Jesus ties the two images together in his next statement: "I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." That is precisely what Jesus did for you and for me. Jesus gave his life so that we might have eternal life. He did that for all humanity. That makes him not just the Good Shepherd. It also makes Him the God Shepherd.

The God Shepherd laid down his life so that we could enter the security of His fold. Within the fold of the God Shepherd, we are safe and secure. Jesus not only knows us by name; he calls us by name. That's what we want, isn't it? We want a God Shepherd who knows and calls us by name. We want a God Shepherd who is personally involved in our lives. We want a God Shepherd who will cry with us and rejoice with us. We want a God Shepherd who knows what we need before we even ask it.

In Jesus Christ, we have just such a God Shepherd - one who is not only the shepherd of the flock, but also the gate, the door through which the sheep enter the flock. Jesus, our God Shepherd knows us by name. That much is certain. The question for us today is, how well do we know His voice?

That's the other part of the relationship between the sheep and the shepherd. The shepherd knows the sheep and calls them by name. But the sheep also know the shepherd and recognize and follow His voice. Our God Shepherd knows us intimately, calls us by name and leads us where we ought to go. What our God Shepherd wants from us is for us to know Him intimately, call on His name and follow where He leads.

If we know Him, call on Him and follow where He leads, we are safe within His fold. If we're not sure that we know his voice, then know that Jesus welcomes everyone – every one. The flock of our Lord Jesus Christ is inclusive, not exclusive. Everyone who trusts in him is welcome.

There are some churches who want to be the gate or in control of the gate. But that is not the role of the sheep. Our role is to welcome and embrace whoever the God shepherd lets in. So, if you feel outside the flock, know that the gate is wide open for you. If we are inside the flock, our job is to welcome all who come to us. Our God Shepherd welcomes everyone with open arms, which makes him a very good shepherd indeed.

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

**The Charge: Wherever you go, God is sending you. Wherever you are, God will equip you. God will accomplish a purpose in your being there. Christ who dwells within you has something He wants to do through you where you are. Believe this and go in God's grace, love and power. Amen**