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## A Service of Prayer and Praise

June 27, 2021

### Sermon

John 10:14-16

Introduction: There was this king—his name isn't so important today—there was this king who ruled the country of Prussia in the early 1800s. He did a lot of bad things when he was king, but one of the worst things he did was try to force the Lutherans in Prussia to give up their Lutheran liturgy and Lutheran hymns. He even prohibited them from teaching their children in their Lutheran schools. A lot of Lutherans didn't really care what the king did, but some Lutherans did care and they got out of Prussia and came to America. The first group arrived in 1839 right down the road in Freistadt. They cleared the land, they built a church, and they started a school to teach their children the truths of God's Word. In 1861 another group of German Lutherans started a church closer to the lake. They called their church St. John's and asked the Freistadt pastor to serve them. And I have a hunch that a love for Christian education which has been obvious here for so many years began way back then.

Confessional Lutherans have always taken the Christian education of children seriously. You won't find Lutheran schools and high schools in the ELCA. Over the years congregations in our synod and the Missouri Synod have spent billions of dollars on school buildings, school equipment, and teacher compensation. Whatever seeds might have been planted at St. John's in the 1860s were nourished by the pastors who followed. Over the course of your history you've offered financial support so St. John's children could attend Lutheran schools in the area. In 1966 you started a Christian day school of your own and in 1967 dedicated a building to house it. In the late 90s you added a pre-school ministry for three and four year-olds. And of course, you've always had a Sunday School. So, for much of your history St. John's Congregation has put its heart and soul and energy and money into the cause of Christian education. Just like good Lutherans should!

Of course, there's more to Christian education than being a Lutheran. You heard Jesus' words in the baptism this morning, **Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.** Before he ascended into heaven, Jesus told Peter, **Feed my sheep**, but he also said, **Feed my lambs**. Think how often we connect the children with the Good Shepherd. Artists do it all the time; they paint the Good Shepherd with a child in his arms or with children walking beside him. Children sing, "I am Jesus little lamb." It seems kind of natural this morning to listen to what the Good Shepherd has to say.

From John, chapter 10, the words of Jesus: **I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father.** Jesus knows all his children. He knew Brooklyn (the child who was baptized) before she was born and he knew me before I was born—and he knew all of you, too. David wrote in Psalm 139: **Lord, you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.** And Jesus' children know him, too. Watch the face of a child when you show him a picture of Jesus and see his eyes light up. There's no doubt in their little prayers, no worries in their little songs. It's fascinating to see the comparison Jesus makes here. He knows his sheep and his sheep know him just as intimately as he and his Father know each another. Can you imagine that! Listen to David again: **You have searched me, LORD, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely.**

Jesus knows little children well enough to know something else. At the time of the Great Flood, God observed that **Every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood.** David confessed, **Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time**

**my mother conceived me.** Every child born on this planet inherits the spiritual DNA of his parents and that DNA carries the disease called sin. The disease of sin has symptoms, and the symptoms are called sins. People don't like to hear the Bible say that cute little babies are sinful, but you don't have to be a Bible believer to notice it. Watch the impatience when the baby isn't fed; watch the tantrum when the baby hears no. All of us, whether one day old or 100 years old, have to live with the reality of sin and we have to face the punishment that comes with it. And that's why the Good Shepherd said, **I lay down my life for the sheep.** That's what it took to solve the sin problem, not just in children, but in adults, too. Jesus obeyed the divine commands we all failed to obey and he endured the punishment we all were destined to deserve. The sin we were born with—we and our children—and the sins we committed—ours and our children's—they're all gone because the Good Shepherd lived and died in our place.

The forgiveness of sins and life with Jesus begins with Holy Baptism. This morning the Lord Jesus brought this little baby into the family of God. He forgave her sins and adopted her as his own child. But life with Jesus goes on after baptism and it continues in Christian education. Little prayers and little songs at first, then simple Bible stories about Jesus' birth in a manger and death on a cross. Then the Lord's Prayer and responses in worship; even little children can learn to say, "Thanks be to God" and to sing "Lord, have mercy." Parents teach all these truths to their children. They also teach them the difference between right and wrong and between safe and unsafe. And then the church gets involved to add a helping hand to take children to the next level of knowledge and behavior and faith. The home, the school, and the church are the dynamic trio that work together to keep children close to Jesus, to provide guidance for growing up, to supply weapons against temptation, to offer a reason for living, and a sure hope for dying.

Today we give thanks for all the opportunities you have had to bring Jesus close to children as parents and as a congregation. Obviously, there is some sadness and regret here today as we bring the ministry of Building Blocks Christian Learning Center to a close. The decision to end this ministry was not made lightly and it was not unanimous. There is no reason to retreat and try to list the causes. But there is cause for you to look up to the Lord who has enabled you and empowered to serve children over the past 160 years. And so we say, "Thanks be to God."

The truth is that time moves on and circumstances change. They did for Jesus, too. Again and again in his ministry Jesus made it clear that he had come for the lost sheep of the house of Israel. But even as he spoke these words in John 10, it was becoming obvious that the lost sheep of the house of Israel weren't interested. Actually he was speaking these words about the Good Shepherd to his opponents and detractors. Jesus could see that the time was coming soon when the good news would head in a new direction. And so he said, **I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.** Jesus realized that God's great plan to save the whole world was beginning to become a reality. Up until then God's chosen nation had been Israel; from now on, God's chosen people would be all those who put their faith in his Son. He knew that these people would come from **every nation, tribe, language, and people.** Moments before he ascended, Jesus told his followers, **you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."**

There aren't very many people at St. John's anymore, but there are plenty of people around you and they aren't all little children. Like us, they have sinned more often than anyone can count. Like us, they give in to the devil's temptations and are fooled by our godless society. Like us, they deserve to be abandoned by God and punished forever. But Jesus lived and died for them just like he lived and died for us. Jesus forgives their sins just like he forgives our sins. Jesus offers them guidance just like he offers it to us. He is ready to speak to them in his Word, he is ready to hear their prayers, he is ready to offer them a place in heaven just like with us. All these people are our mission and our ministry. Some live in our homes or are part of our families. Some live in houses on our block and in condominiums in our neighborhood. Some attend Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School and Concordia University. Some live in Thailand and Zambia and China. All these are the **other sheep** that the Good Shepherd calls his own. Now Jesus calls us all to bring these other sheep to him that they may hear his voice that there may be one flock and one shepherd.

I ask you all to pray with me today that the Good Shepherd spare us disappointment and regret during these days. I ask you to pray with me that the Good Shepherd leads us to put our heart and soul and energy and money to serve the Savior's other sheep as we served his little lambs. And pray with me that the Lord would bless our witness so that many more sheep may come to the dignity and the destiny of his flock. Amen.

Pastor James Tiefel