

Jesus says He's a whole lotta things, but honestly He's not very good at many of them. Like, when it comes to being a manager, Jesus isn't much good at that. Remember the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard? I mean, what kinda manager pays the guy who just got there the same wage as the guy who's been there all day? Tell me, what manager does that? None—except Jesus.

And when it comes to farming, Jesus isn't much good at that either. Remember the Parable of the Sower? I mean, what kinda farmer gets to sowing right away without first making the necessary preparations, like plowing and weeding? And what kinda farmer, when he does sow, wastes his costly seed by carelessly scattering it everywhere and anywhere, even on the path and on rocky ground? Tell me, what farmer does that? None—except Jesus.

Then, when it comes to being a shepherd, He's anything but a good one. Oh sure, I know He says He's a "good shepherd" but don't be fooled. Don't let those Precious Moments figurines deceive you. Don't be misled by those pictures of gentle Jesus with a little lamb wrapped around His neck. I mean, what kinda shepherd lays down his life for the sake of his sheep? Tell me, what shepherd does that? None—except Jesus.

It's insane, when you think about it! It's ludicrous! It's absolutely absurd! The sheep are there for the shepherd, not the other way around. A man might die for his family, his friends, his country maybe—but a flock of dumb, stinky, dirty sheep? It doesn't make any sense!

Jesus tells us, it's "the hired hand who sees the wolf coming and runs for his life"—well, of course he does! There's no way he's gonna put it all on the line for a buncha beasts! Even if he's not a hired hand, I guarantee no shepherd's gonna stick his neck out for the likes of animals! Best case scenario, he might fight off a couple wolves—after all, his livelihood's in jeopardy—but I'd like to see you find a shepherd willing to risk it all against a ravenous pack.

It's illogical, it's counterintuitive, it's irrational! Either He's nuts . . . or maybe He's the great forerunner of PETA . . . or the Patron Saint of Environmental Causes. But that can't be. After all, this is the same guy who curses a poor defenseless fig tree just because it's having a bad season. This is the same guy who drowns a whole herd of swine when they were just minding their own business. Jesus shows us that He's definitely no tree-hugger, He's certainly no animal-lover—so what would make Him say such a thing?

Maybe we misheard Him—perhaps He never said that He's a "good" shepherd to begin with. After all, if we've been translating Him as a "good" shepherd, then we don't have the full story. The word for "good" in Greek is *agathos*—it's a value judgment that something isn't bad but is good. And while Jesus is good in many ways, He's not very good at shepherding—at least He sure doesn't act like a good shepherd. But *agathos*, "good," isn't the word Jesus uses here in today's Gospel, John chapter 10.

No, Jesus uses a different word instead—*kalos*—which means much more than good in the traditional sense. *Kalos* means good as in "beautiful," "noble," or "worthy." It's not so much a judgment call on how good He is at shepherding. Rather, it defines His inward nature, His inner character, expresses the depths of His being—exposes what's deep in His heart. And understood this way, we begin to make sense of why Jesus isn't like other shepherds.

No other shepherd would think the sheep's life is worth more than his. But Jesus is the *kalos* shepherd—the "beautiful" shepherd. "I lay down my life for the sheep," He says. Even though you and I are like dumb, stinky, dirty sheep, Jesus would rather die than let anything happen to us. And so He who is the Author of life, selflessly lays down His life for our sakes. It is an incredibly beautiful thing that He does, a perfect act of selfless love for you and me. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).

And no other shepherd would be willing to do whatever it takes to protect his sheep. But Jesus is the *kalos* shepherd—the "noble" shepherd. "No one takes it from Me," says Jesus, "but I lay it down of my own accord." Seeing the pack of wolves licking their chops at us, Jesus steps in between. He who is King of kings and Lord of lords, comes not to be

served but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many (cf. Matthew 20:28). It is a truly noble thing that He does, being swallowed up in death for us. Manning up, even if it means the death of Him, Jesus does what's necessary to keep us safe.

And no other shepherd would have it in him to sacrifice himself. But Jesus is the *kalos* shepherd—the “worthy” shepherd. “For this reason the Father loves me,” Jesus says, “because I lay down my life that I may take it up again.” Looking at us, so vulnerable and helpless, unable to save ourselves, Jesus the Shepherd becomes a sheep. He who is God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, became flesh and dwelled among us. Clothed in our skin, wearing our wool, God became man—yet was without sin. And being blameless, He took our place, became our substitute, filled in for you and me, as a worthy sacrifice to God. Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, who by His blood ransomed people for God (cf. Revelation 5:9).

It is this *kalos*—beautiful, noble, worthy—Shepherd, who was nailed to His rod and His staff to comfort you. By the crook of His cross, He has gathered you into His fold. This is why the Father loves the Son, but it is also the reason why the Father loves you. God's wrath for sin was spent on Jesus, so that He could pour out His love on you. But our *kalos* Shepherd is not a dead shepherd. He has authority to lay down His life, *and* He has authority to take it up again.

The reason Good Shepherd Sunday falls during Easter every year is because He's a risen, living Shepherd. A Shepherd who even today still cares for you. Today, for you who hunger and thirst for righteousness, He makes you to lie down in the green pastures of His Holy Church. For you, desiring to be cleansed from all unrighteousness, He leads you beside the still waters of Holy Baptism. For you, longing to be filled, your Shepherd spreads a table before you—your cup overflows at His Holy Supper. Here, now, He restores your soul by His grace. Forgiving you, He leads you in paths of righteousness. Granting you eternal life, goodness and mercy follow you all the days of your life, and you will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Jesus might not be like other shepherds, he might not even be all that good at shepherding. But He is beautiful and noble and worthy, He is a *kalos* Shepherd. And what might seem crazy to us, to God is what makes such a Shepherd so good.