

A Sermon for the Second Sunday After Easter & Ss. Philip and James, Apostles  
John 10:11-16  
by Peter Bockoven

The Text

**11** I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. **12** He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. **13** He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. **14** I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, **15** just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. **16** And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

The Sermon

“Philip’s Shepherd is Our Shepherd, From Beginning to End”

- I. Friends, there are two things going on today. It's the Second Sunday after Easter. The Sunday Gospel describes the intimate relationship between Jesus and his followers. He is our shepherd, and we are his sheep. He guides us throughout life, with his voice in the gospel; and we, by the power of the Holy Spirit, hear his voice and follow him.
- II. And it's also the day we remember two of Jesus' apostles: Saint Philip, and Saint James. It's a good coincidence that these days have fallen together. Because the lives of these apostles—especially that of Saint Philip—illustrate so well what it means that Jesus is the Good Shepherd of his sheep.
- III. This morning, then, we'll try to do this: to remember what it means that Jesus is our Good Shepherd, as illustrated by the life of St. Philip. St. Philip will be our example. We will see that, just as Jesus shepherded Philip throughout his life, so that he might live and have eternal life, so he also shepherds us.
- IV. And why will we look at only St. Philip? Because admittedly, we know much more of him than of Saint James. Scripture records more events of Philip; and it's difficult to piece together the life of St. James, since there were multiple apostles called James. I'll leave it to a future preacher who knows more than I do to preach about him.
- V. The first place we find Philip is in John 1. He was the third disciple called by Jesus in John's gospel. He was from the same city as the two called before him: Peter and Andrew. Jesus said to Philip, “Follow me,” and he did so immediately. And just as Andrew ran to tell his brother Peter about Christ, so also Philip runs and tells Nathanael about him. He says: “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote” (John 1:45).
- VI. Here we see Jesus' first work in Philip's life as the Good Shepherd. He called Philip to follow him. By the Word Jesus spoke, he called Philip. And by the word Jesus spoke, Philip

came to recognize that no ordinary man had called him. This man who called him, was the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures. He was the Christ, the Son of God.

- VII. Jesus deals with his disciples the same way today. By his Word, Jesus calls us. By his Word, Jesus makes us his disciples, who follow him. Whenever you first received the Word in faith, it was then you became Jesus' disciple; the Word as it was taught to you, or the Word as it was given to you in Holy Baptism. "Faith comes by hearing," Paul says in Romans 10, "and hearing by the Word of Christ."
- VIII. And it was not only at the beginning of your life, but throughout your life, that Jesus calls out to you through his Word. Whenever we preach, whenever we teach, whenever we administer the Sacraments, remember: these are no ordinary, human things. Whenever you hear the Word and are taught by it, whenever you hear the word explaining Jesus Christ and his Gospel, to whom are you ultimately listening? Who is the one ultimately speaking to you? "The Word of Christ," the apostle says: the word that comes from, and is spoken by him, through human agents. And it's through this speaking to you through the Word, that you became, and continue to be sustained as, Jesus' disciple.
- IX. So we see Philip called by Jesus. The next place we find him is John 6, where Jesus miraculously feeds a crowd of 5,000 people. The crowd had been following Jesus, without food. So Jesus asks Philip: "Where are we to buy bread for them?" Philip responds: Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread." But Jesus knew how he would feed the crowd. He was testing Philip, directing his attention to what he was about to do, so that he might learn from him. He then performed the great miracle, feeding the crowd.
- X. How might the Lord have been testing Philip here? He placed Philip in a difficult situation of need. And he asked Philip to consider how he would get out of that need. In the beginning we see Philip relying on himself. He looks at the situation, and points out there was nothing he or anyone could do. And it was after leading Philip to this place, that the Lord Jesus showed who it was that could do anything: he himself, by his divine power.
- XI. So we see how the Lord shepherds us also. The Lord brings his people to places where they more clearly recognize their need and their limitations. Friends, you've seen war going on in Europe. You've seen the economic effects of that war. Things cost more now. Money is tighter. Perhaps you've had to adjust your monthly budget, working with less than you used to. Perhaps you haven't yet, but fear you may have to soon. What is it that you see more clearly as a result of all this? You are not in control. But you are subject to forces far greater than you. Forces that move and turn above you. And you, like a little gear in an engine, are forced to turn along with them.
- XII. And it is God, in his almighty power, that has allowed this to happen; so that, through these things, you might more fully sense what the Word of God has told you: you are finite, you are not in control, and you need help. And why? So that the promises of God might grow their roots even deeper into your heart. So St. Peter writes: "You have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:6–7).

XIII. What would Jesus' promise, "Behold, I am with you always" mean, if we did not feel that we needed Jesus' presence? What would his promise to fight against our enemies for us mean, if we did not sense that we had any enemies? We would despise such promises as unnecessary and meaningless. And as a result our faith would surely shrink, if not diminish altogether. So that this might not happen, the Lord brings us to recognize our need, testing us; so that we might continue to be upheld by his promises.

XIV. So we've seen Philip at his calling, and at the feeding of the 5,000. We find him next in John 12. There we see Jesus and his disciples at a feast in Jerusalem. Some Greek-speaking Jews are present also at the feast, and they ask Philip to bring them to Christ. Perhaps Philip was also a Greek speaker; he had a Greek name, at any rate. So, Philip tells Andrew about the Greek-speakers; and they together tell Jesus about them. Jesus takes the opportunity to teach Philip and Andrew about his upcoming death and resurrection, and the result it would have. His death would be like a seed, that is planted in the ground and dies, but grows into a fruitful new plant. This is to say, though Jesus would die, he would obtain salvation for the world. Not only for those living in Judah, but for all peoples, of every language, in the world.

XV. Here we see that Christ called Philip for a special purpose. He called him to be an apostle to bring other people to Christ. It was Philip's special role, in this circumstance, to bring the Greek-speakers at Jerusalem to Christ. Jesus was shepherding Philip, placing him in the exact place he was meant to be, to be a blessing to others.

XVI. So also the Lord deals with you and me. Now, we live in a modern, democratic society. We have much more freedom of choice than people did in recent centuries past did; to have whatever kind of job we please; to attend whatever school we want; to study any thing, so long as we are able. But this freedom of choice can be kind of crippling. What am I meant to do? We might ask. And once we have made a decision, we might look back and wonder: did I make the right one? Did I make some tragic mistake? Am I ruining my life unintentionally, and doing something not meant for me?

XVII. But here's the thing: we are like Philip. Where we are right now, though we have exercised our own reason and made our own choices, is the place that the Lord has brought us to. The Lord, before you were born, had a plan for your life, a direction that it would take. He knew that he would call you by the Gospel, to faith in Christ, and would place you in the exact situation that you are in now. Why? So that you might perform good works. So that, by working according to your calling, you might be a blessing to other people. And in this way, as God it pleases God, to perhaps call others, by your example and conversation, to faith in Christ. So St. Paul says in Ephesians 2: "We are [God's] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." And St. Peter again, 1 Peter 2: "Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation."

XVIII. Now for the final place we see St. Philip: during Holy Week again, according to John chapter 14, probably on Maundy Thursday. Jesus had just washed his disciples feet; he had given the commandment, that his disciples love each other; he foretold Judas' and Peter's denial. And then he comforts his disciples, in light of his upcoming death. He comforts them

with the promise concerning what Jesus' death and resurrection would effect. By going to die for the world, Jesus was preparing a place for his people to live. Giving them an eternal home that would never fade away. And he would bring his disciples there. For he said: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Our home is with the Father; and the way to the Father, is Jesus, by his death and resurrection.

XIX. It was after explaining all this, that Philip asked Jesus: "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Jesus then responds to Philip: "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." So he teaches Philip about his coming, heavenly home. And he continues to teach him, even as he fails to understand, about who he is. He is the one who is at perfect unity with the Father. He and his Father, with the Holy Spirit are the one, true God. Through him, a person sees the one true God and obtains life with him again, for eternity.

XX. Jesus gave Philip and the rest these special encouragements, because they, as the Apostles, would have to suffer greatly, as they spread the Gospel throughout the world. According to one tradition, Philip was crucified on a tall cross. So Jesus reminded them about their heavenly home, so that when their persecution came, they wouldn't lose hope, but could press on, knowing that they would obtain eternal life, even in the face of death. Jesus and his Gospel was Philip's shepherd, throughout his life, to the end.

XXI. So also Christ shepherds us. Jesus gave Philip wonderful promises, for the time when he would no longer see Jesus bodily. So also the Lord gives us the same wonderful promises, who do not see him bodily, but by faith. We've never seen the Lord bodily, face to face. And yet we have a whole life ahead of us, perhaps long, perhaps short, in which we are called to continue to follow Christ. How do we persist in this? How do we hold onto the faith, even if trouble or persecution may come our way? By the promise of Jesus' death and resurrection, and what our inheritance is because of it: just as the case was for Philip.

XXII. Listen to St. Peter's words again (1 Peter 1): "According to his great mercy, [God] has called us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you." And he continues later: "Though you do not now see [Jesus], you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls." This promise of Jesus' resurrection, that he originally spoke to his disciples, has continued to ring out throughout history. Indeed, for 2,00 years, it has never gone silent. Jesus has risen from the dead. And he's obtained a home for you that will never be destroyed. He's gone there already: and he is shepherding and leading you through life to it, by his Word, and by his Sacraments.

XXIII. Here we see what Jesus meant when he said in our Gospel lesson: I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice." Here the Lord was speaking about his church throughout time and space. He was speaking about you. He's called you by the Gospel. He's brought you to faith in his death and resurrection. And he's lead you to believe that you have an eternal home waiting for you. This voice of Jesus in his Means of Grace, is what continually sustains you until you at last obtain eternal life with him.

XXIV. So today we remember Jesus, our Good Shepherd; we remember Ss. Philip and James, especially Philip, and how the Lord shepherded him. And we remember that we are all like St. Philip. The Lord called us; he tests and instructs us; he obtained eternal life for us; and his guiding voice leads us to our eternal home, though we have not yet seen the Lord. Blessed be our Lord for this work among us. Amen.