

4 Easter B  
Folded Followers

April 21, 2024  
John 10:11-18

Jesus says: “I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold.” That implies that there are sheep that belong to his fold. “Folded Followers” are the sheep that are in Jesus’ sheep fold. A fold was an enclosure or a pen in a field where livestock, especially sheep, were kept. Jesus indicates that there are also other sheep that are not folded.

Jesus doesn’t say who these other, non-folded sheep, might be. I’m inclined to believe that Jesus considers every person to be his sheep. Some of the sheep are part of the fold that are gathered together to be led in and out of the fold by the Good Shepherd; and others are not. Some are under the protection and guidance of the Good Shepherd others are not. Some have the community and protection that the sheep pen offers and others do not.

Jesus indicates two differences between those in the fold and those outside. One: Folded sheep are led by the Good Shepherd. Two: they listen to his voice. The others are not led by Jesus. They do not listen to his voice – at least not yet, but Jesus says that they will.

The themes of hearing and being led, that is, following the Shepherd, occur throughout John chapter 10, about the Good Shepherd. Verse 3 says: The sheep **hear** [the shepherd’s] voice. He calls his own sheep by name and **leads** them out.

Verse 7 says has Jesus saying: My sheep **hear** my voice. I know them, and they **follow** me. (v. 27)

In contrast to the sheep who listen to Jesus’ voice, verses 19-21 say:

<sup>19</sup>Again the Jews were divided because of these words. <sup>20</sup>Many of them were saying, “He has a demon and is out of his mind. **Why listen to him?**” <sup>21</sup>Others were saying, “These are not the **words** of one who has a demon.”<sup>1</sup>

Even though the Jews are the chosen people of God with the Lord as their shepherd, as Psalm 23 declares, the fact that some are unwilling to listen to Jesus indicates that they are not yet part of his fold. They haven’t listened to Jesus’ words that would gather them together into the one flock that is protected and led by the Good Shepherd.

There are people today who don’t listen to Jesus. They may still be Jesus’ sheep, but they are not part of the fold. They aren’t in the sheep pen. They don’t have all the benefits that Jesus offers them.

Folded followers listen to Jesus. They know his voice. For us that means such things as reading scriptures, listening to sermons, meditating on devotions, singing hymns, conversing with others about our faith. It also implies that the sheep congregate together and become a congregation.

For those who might be interested – like I am – the words congregate and congregation come from Latin and means “to flock together (like sheep).” Technically, only those who have flocked together are the congregation.

We become a congregation by flocking together in this wonderful building each Sunday – and for many of us also during the week.

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<sup>1</sup> John 10:19-21a

I fear for the faith of those who feel that they can be Christians without being connected to a fold – a Christian fellowship – a congregation. People who claim to listen to Jesus' voice, but are not led into a Christian fellowship, I wonder who is leading them. Jesus' goal is that all of his sheep should be part of the fold. Jesus' goal is that there is to be one flock under the authority of the one Shepherd. Even with many different congregations, we still confess that we are part of the one holy catholic and apostolic church. We see ourselves as folded followers – members of the one flock with Jesus as our Shepherd.

What makes Jesus the good shepherd? Three times it is mentioned in our text that he lays down his life for the sheep. He does that because he cares so much for the sheep. The hired hands don't care for the sheep. They run away when danger comes. They want to protect their own lives – not the lives of the sheep.

Jesus says later in John: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."<sup>2</sup> By laying down his life, Jesus manifested his love for us and thus the love of God for us. Jesus, actually goes beyond that. He laid down his life even for his enemies. He prayed that his Father would forgive those who unjustly executed him.

In the verse just before our gospel reading Jesus says: "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."<sup>3</sup> It would seem to me that the abundant life for sheep doesn't require anything more than to lie down and eat in green pastures, to drink at still waters, and to be protected from hungry wolves.

The abundant life for us is a little more complicated. Like sheep we need food and drink. We need restful sleep. We need protection from enemies. But more than these, for the abundant life, we need to know that we part of a community who loves and cares for us and we can love and care for in return; that lets us know that we are worthwhile people; that we have something to offer others. The abundant life that Jesus offers is not so much about things we may have, but about the loving relationship we experience with God and with the other people of Jesus' flock – both those in the fold and out of the fold.

God loves the whole world. It's because God loves this world that our stewardship committee has worked long and hard to put together our Earth Care Fair this afternoon. We also love and care for our planet and want the best for it and the people living on it for a long, long future.

For us folded followers, today, this morning, we again experience the Good Shepherd laying down his life for us. His body is given for us. His blood is shed for us. He does that because he loves us. He does that because he cares for us. He does that to protect us from the evil of sin both within our own lives and out there in the world. Those who are outside the fold, miss out on this wonderful experience of God's love given to us in such a tangible way – a love that is shared among us – a love that forgives all our sins and promises us an eternal life in the future and an abundant life now.

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<sup>2</sup> John 15:13

<sup>3</sup> John 10:10b