

# Jesus: I AM the good shepherd

Message for Sunday, August 4, 2013  
by Bruce Fraser

**Scripture:** John 10:1-18

## Children's Message:

Do you like bees? They are very interesting to watch, how they work together. But it's not so nice if they sting you.

Have you ever been stung by a bee or a wasp? I did once: it was when I was about six years old, and one flew inside my nose. Both the bee and I panicked, and it stung me. I was scared of bees for about twenty years after that.

Here's a story about getting stung by a bee:

A boy and his father were driving down a country road on a beautiful spring afternoon, when a bumblebee flew in the car window. The little boy, who was allergic to bee stings, was petrified. The father quickly reached out, grabbed the bee, squeezed it in his hand, and then released it. The boy grew frantic as it buzzed by him.

Once again the father reached out his hand, but this time he pointed to his palm. There stuck in his skin was the stinger of the bee. "Do you see this?" he asked. "You don't need to be afraid anymore. I've taken the sting for you."

Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." Jesus died, and then he rose to life again. Because of him, we do not need to fear death. He has taken the sting from death.

**Message:** "Jesus: I AM the good shepherd"

## 1) Jesus lays down his life

Paul Grassie is a United Church minister near Peterborough. But I know him better as someone who loves to ride a motorcycle. On these warm summer days, I imagine he loves the feel of the cooling breeze as he skims along the highway.

Paul was once describing to me the sheer joy of riding:

- feeling the wind push against his body
- the wide open spaces all around him.
- how the machine becomes an extension of him, as they lean into tight curves as one body.

However, he said, it didn't feel so great when he laid down his machine. "Lay down your machine?" I

repeated. "What's wrong with that?" I do that with my bicycle all the time — when I stop somewhere, I just lay it on the ground or up against a tree.

Paul explained that to "lay down" a motorcycle means to wipe out. It's very painful, skidding along pavement or gravel, with a several hundred pounds of metal grinding your leg into the ground. The leather pants and jacket help, but barely.

Jesus laid down his life for us. The difference here is that his was no accident. In fact, in the space of eight verses, Jesus says four times that he lays down his life:

**11: I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.**

**15: And I lay down my life for the sheep.**

**17: The Father loves me because I lay down my life that I may have it back again.**

**18: I lay down my life voluntarily.**

Jesus is looking to the future, when he will give his life on the cross.

Why? Why would someone deliberately set out to die? And what good did it do?

For the answers to these questions, let's look back to the verses just before this section.

**John 10:9-10, New Living Translation:**

**"Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. Wherever they go, they will find green pastures. The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give life in all its fullness."**

Jesus says his purpose in life was to give life to others. But that doesn't answer the question. It just gives rise to even more questions:

How? What has someone who lived 2,000 years ago got to do with me today? How can his death mean a fuller life for me?

Jesus says that he is the gate, the means by which we are "saved." What does that mean?

## 2) Jesus lays down his life for the sheep

All of us have done wrong things in life. We've said and done things to hurt other people; we've polluted the earth; we've turned away from the pain and suffering of those around us. We have savoured the feeling of bitterness against an someone who hurt us. In short, we've disobeyed God's commands. That's what the Bible calls "sin."

How can you ever make up to someone the damage you've done to their feelings? How much is a broken heart worth?

Add up all the times you've ever done this. Take it to court, and ask the judge what your penalty is. The judge can only shake her head and say, "I'm sorry. There's too much here. The sentence is more than I can even imagine."

That's where Jesus comes in. Jesus speaks on our behalf and says, "I will pay the penalty. I will bear the burden of Bruce's sin, and take it on myself."

I know that for some of you, this explanation still doesn't answer the question. In fact, it leaves me in tension, wanting more. I want a nice, neat package. I don't like to leave loose ends dangling.

As I've said before, there are lots of things about the Christian faith I don't understand. But that doesn't mean I don't believe them. And it certainly doesn't mean that I can't enjoy their benefits.

Questions: Do you enjoy the benefits of having Jesus as your Saviour? I'll put it this way:

- Do you have the joy that comes from knowing that God loves you, just the way you are, even with all the wrong you've done in your life?
- Do you have the peace that comes from knowing that your life – both present and future – is safe and secure with Jesus, and that nothing can break that bond?

You see, once you have peace with God, it becomes much easier to live in peace with other people. Once you know that God forgives you, it becomes much easier to do the same for others. Once you know that nothing can separate you from God's love, that gives you courage to do things you might otherwise be nervous about.

Here's an example of someone who had God's peace in his life, and because of that was able to help others.

### 3) What it feels like to have someone die for you

It's difficult to find beauty in death. It's even more difficult to find beauty in a death camp. Especially Auschwitz. Four million Jews died there in World War II. A half-ton of human hair is still preserved. The showers that sprayed poison gas still stand. But for all the ugly memories of Auschwitz, Franciszek Gajowniczek remembers one of beauty. It is his memory of Maximilian Kolbe.

In February 1941, Kolbe was sent to Auschwitz. He was a Roman Catholic priest. This death factory was like hell on earth; he maintained the gentleness of Christ. He shared his food. He gave up his bunk. He prayed for the guards, even the sadistic ones. He was soon given the nickname "Saint of Auschwitz."

By that summer, Auschwitz was working like a well organized killing machine. Trainloads of people came in every day. The occupants were "processed," and empty trains pulled out again. The prisoners who were permanent residents at Auschwitz had the grisly job of quickly cleaning up the dead bodies before the next train arrived.

About the only problem was when one of these prisoner workers would figure out a way to escape. Usually the escapees were caught, and the next morning at roll call they would be hung with special nooses that slowly choked out their miserable lives — a grave warning to others who might be tempted to try.

Then one July night as the frogs and insects in the marshy land surrounding the camp began their evening chorus, the air was suddenly filled with the baying of dogs, the curses of soldiers, and the roar of motorcycles. A man had escaped from Barracks 14.

The next morning there was a peculiar tension as the ranks of the phantom-thin prisoners lined up for morning roll call in the central square, their eyes on the large gallows before them. But there was no condemned man standing there. That meant the prisoner had made it out of Auschwitz. And that meant death for some of those who remained.

It was the custom to kill ten prisoners for every one who escaped. The commandant would randomly select ten names from the roll book. These victims would be immediately taken to a cell where they would receive no food or water until they died.

The commandant begins calling the names. At each selection another groaning, sweating prisoner steps forward to fill the quota. The tenth name he calls is Gajowniczek. This last one begins to sob. "My poor wife! My poor children! What will they do?"

Suddenly there was a commotion in the ranks. The guards raise their rifles, ready for trouble. The dogs tense, anticipating a command to attack. A prisoner had broken out of line and is pushing his way to the front.

The prisoners gasped. It was their beloved Father Kolbe, the priest who shared his last crust, who heard their confessions and nourished their souls.

There was no fear on his face. No hesitancy in his step. An officer shouts at him to stop or be shot. "I want to talk to the commander," he says calmly. For some reason the officer doesn't club him or kill him. Kolbe stops a few paces from the commandant, removes his hat, and looks the German officer in the eye.

"Herr Kommandant, I wish to make a request, please." That no one is shot is a miracle.

"What is it?"

"I would like to die in the place of this prisoner." He points at the sobbing Gajowniczek.

The audacious request is presented without stammer. "I have no wife or children. Besides, I am old and not good for anything. He's in better condition." (Kolbe knew well the Nazi value system.)

"Who are you?" the commandant asks.

"A Catholic priest."

The block is stunned, the commandant uncharacteristically speechless. After a moment, he barks, "Request granted."

Gajowniczek says, "Prisoners were never allowed to speak. I could only thank him with my eyes. I was stunned and could hardly grasp what was going on. The immensity of it: I, the condemned, am to live and someone else willingly and voluntarily offers his life for me — a stranger. Is this some dream?"

The ten men were herded into the dark, windowless cell for condemned prisoners. As the hours and days passed, however, the camp became aware of something extraordinary happening in the death cell. Coming from the death box, those outside heard the faint sounds of singing. For this time, the prisoners had a shepherd to gently lead them through the shadows of the valley of death, pointing them to the Great Shepherd.

The Saint of Auschwitz outlived the other nine. In fact, he didn't die of thirst or starvation. He died only after the camp doctor injected phenol into his heart on August 14, 1941.

Gajowniczek survived the Holocaust. He made his way back to his hometown, but every year he goes back to

Auschwitz. Every August 14 he goes back to say thank you to the man who died in his place.

Jesus gave his life for me, for you. He did it so that we could be free from sin, free from guilt, free from fear. He did it so that we could have a full life, the way that God had intended for creation from the beginning. Jesus said, "My purpose is to give life in all its fullness."

### Next Steps:

- Do you know – not just hope, but *know* – that God loves you? That's right, just the way you are, with all your flaws and sins.
- Do you enjoy your relationship with God? Does knowing God bring you peace, joy and hope?
- If yes, wonderful! If no, would you like that? Then surrender your life to God, and trust Jesus as your Saviour.
- Who else is there in your life where you need this peace in your relationship? Start praying for God's blessing in that person's life.