

# *Honoring the Father*

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent – March 24/25, 2007

## Sermon Background Study

*John 10:7-18, 27-30 (NRSV)*

<sup>7</sup>So again Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. <sup>8</sup>All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. <sup>9</sup>I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. <sup>10</sup>The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

<sup>11</sup>“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup>The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. <sup>13</sup>The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. <sup>14</sup>I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, <sup>15</sup>just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup>I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. <sup>17</sup>For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. <sup>18</sup>No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”

<sup>27</sup>My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup>I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup>What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father’s hand. <sup>30</sup>The Father and I are one.”

*Do we truly honor God? What does it mean to honor God? In what ways to we honor God?*

From Jesus’ cleansing of the temple in chapter 2 of John’s gospel to today’s passage from chapter 10, the story has been one of the Jewish authorities’ fast rising opposition to Jesus. Though Jesus has performed numerous acts that are signs to his true identity, many do not believe. Though his teachings have become ever clearer and more direct, the Jewish leaders refuse to listen. They’ve clung tightly to their blindness.

In your *Heart & Mind* reading of the gospel, you’ve probably gathered that there isn’t much new theological content from story to story. John just piles up encounter after encounter, teaching after teaching, all trying to convey what is plainly stated in 10:30 when Jesus says, “The Father and I are one.” It is not surprising that some think he must be possessed by demons (10:20) and others pick up stones in order to stone Jesus (10:31). To unbelievers in the crowd, Jesus is blasphemous, dishonoring God with every word spoken and every miracle performed.

### The Bread of Life

One of the keys to reading John’s gospel well is to see how Jesus takes important and treasured Old Testament images of God and reshapes them around himself. In today’s passage, Jesus reshapes Good Shepherd around himself. Chapter 6 focuses on another such image.

After feeding thousands with a few loaves and fishes (the only miracle found in all four gospels), Jesus heads back across the Sea of Galilee. When the crowds catch up to him, Jesus tells them that they’ve come looking for him because of the miraculous feeding they saw. But, he tells them, the Son of Man will give them food that “endures for eternal life” (6:27) and reminds them of their ancient ancestors’ time in the wilderness.

After fleeing Egypt, God led Moses and the Israelites into the Sinai wilderness where the people soon began to complain that they were going to starve and die. God stepped in and provided them with enough food to feed everyone. This food, called manna, was a dewy-like substance found on the ground each morning. It was both nutritious and plentiful. But there was one “catch.” The manna couldn’t be stored for another day. It spoiled overnight. Thus, the people had to come out each day to collect their daily bread. The manna was a lived out parable about trusting God to provide what we need each day. It was about learning to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.”

Jesus tells the crowds, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty,” echoing what he said to the Samaritan woman at the well when he offered her “living water.” By taking the story of God’s manna in the wilderness and refocusing it on himself, Jesus reveals evermore clearly that the Father has sent him, uniquely, and that he is the full revelation of God.

Lest we think that we are making too much of Jesus’ statements, many in the crowd grasp the far-reaching implications of Jesus’ actions and words. “Isn’t this Jesus, son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know,?” some said. “How can he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven?’” It’s a fair question. How could a person of flesh and blood claim such things, boldly indentifying himself with God?

As the gospel unfolds, Jesus’ claims get bolder and bolder, evermore clearly revealing that Jesus and the Father (God) are one, that when you’ve seen Jesus, you’ve seen God.

## Honoring God

When Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd,” he takes upon himself yet another powerful image of God from the Hebrew Scriptures. God is the Good Shepherd of Psalm 23.<sup>1</sup> Yet here, Jesus is the one who protects the sheep, leading them to water and pasture. Jesus is the gate through whom the sheep pass into the safety of the pen. Jesus is the one willing to lay down his life for the sheep, ready to jump between them and the wolves that threaten to devour them. One can imagine Jesus looking directly at the Jewish priests and Pharisees as he talks about wolves and thieves.

Though Jesus is rejected by many Jews, he tries to help them all see that when they believe in him, they are honoring God, just as we are called to honor God. As I mentioned a few weeks ago, Rev. Kathryn Ransdell designed this Lenten sermon series. Here are some of her reflections on honoring God.

I once heard that if the only reason you can imagine for honoring your mother and father is that they gave birth to you, then that is reason enough to honor them. Just the fact that they gave you life, even if they did nothing else the rest of your life, is reason enough to honor them.

We honor “Our Father,” our heavenly parent, in worship because God gave us life. If all God gave us was life, that would be more than enough reason to honor God all of our days. And yet, God gave us more than life; God gave us life abundant.

Jesus is the good shepherd and we honor Jesus for the sacrifice he made for us: He laid down his life for us. We honor Jesus because Jesus not only laid down his life for us, but he is always out seeking that one lost sheep, always showing mercy and grace to those who have strayed. We honor Jesus because he has given us eternal life and we will never perish.

We honor Jesus by believing that this eternal life is NOW. We begin to shape our lives by choosing things for our life that allow us to follow the Good Shepherd. There are thieves and wolves out there waiting to snatch us from the fold. Some of these wolves and thieves are things beyond our control. A large number of those wolves and thieves are things that we choose in this life. It’s all about our free will and our choice to honor ourselves or honor God. There is temptation in this choice. In the season of Lent, we are trying our best to overcome our temptations and we trust our Heavenly Father, to whom we pray each week, asking and pleading, “Lead us not into temptation.”

In Martin Luther’s *Small Catechism*, you will find this question and answer:

“Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother, that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.”

“Q. What does this mean?”

“A. We must respect and love God, so that we will neither look down on our parents or superiors nor irritate them, but will honor them, serve them, obey them, love them, and value them.”

How are we honoring God? Through serving God, obeying God’s commandments, loving those whom God loves, and valuing those whom God values. We honor God by committing to worship each Sunday, whether we feel like it or not, whether the choir is good or not, whether the sermon is half-full or half-empty. This is how we honor God.

### “Though I was blind, now I see.”

A key story leading up to the plot to kill Jesus (11:45-53) is yet another confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees (chapter 9). Jesus heals a man who has been blind since birth and the Pharisees find themselves in a dilemma.

The Pharisees’ problem is this. Jesus has again broken Sabbath Law, which makes him a “sinner” so far as the Pharisees are concerned, but “How could a man who is a sinner perform such signs?,” some Pharisees ask (9:16). Even they are divided.

The Pharisees’ solution is to conduct an inquiry into the matter. They ask the healed man, who simply says that the one who healed him is a prophet. They drag in the man’s parents, demanding to know who healed their son. The couple acknowledges that the man is their son and that he was blind at birth, but, fearing ostracism from the temple, they tell the Pharisees to ask the man themselves, even though the parents know who healed their son.

But the healed man won’t back off his story. He has nothing to say about whether Jesus is a sinner, he just knows that Jesus healed him. “If this man were not from God, he could do nothing” (9:33). This man’s story is one of courageous faith. When Jesus reveals to the man that Jesus is the Son of Man, the man’s response is a simple, “Lord, I believe.”

The Pharisees don’t find a way out of their dilemma. They know that Jesus broke Sabbath Law. They know that Jesus made the blind man see. But they have crammed God into a small box of their own making, and are blind to the new understanding of God that Jesus offers them. More pointedly, Jesus says, they should be able to see the truth. The Pharisees are spiritually blind, whereas the man was only physically blind. The man was made to see, but the Pharisees cling tightly to their blindness.

<sup>1</sup>For much more on the Good Shepherd imagery and Psalm 23, see the Sermon Background Study, “There’s the Rub,” from November 26, 2006. Psalm 23 and a portion of today’s passage from John were the focus of that study. It is available on-line at [www.standrewacademy.org](http://www.standrewacademy.org) under “Sermon Background Studies.”

# Reading With Heart & Mind

March 25 - 31

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help.

Jot down a few questions or thoughts that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p><b>Sunday John 12:12-50</b> Jesus enters Jerusalem as the triumphant returning king, using OT images and references to stake his messianic claims.</p>	<p><b>Monday John 13</b> Jesus tries to prepare his disciples for what is to come. Why do you think he uses foot-washing? Why don't the disciples stop Judas?</p>
<p><b>Tuesday John 14</b> This chapter begins Jesus' last and longest discourse. How would you summarize what Jesus has to say about (1) where he is going and (2) the promise of the Holy Spirit.</p>	<p><b>Wednesday John 15:1-16:4</b> What does the image of Jesus as the true vine and we as the branches convey to you? What does it mean to abide in Christ? What does Jesus mean when he says it is better to be hated by the world than to be loved by it?</p>
<p><b>Thursday John 16:5-33</b> How could Jesus' going away possibly be to the disciples' advantage (16:7)? How is it that the disciples' sorrow will turn into joy?</p>	<p><b>Friday John 17</b> This is Jesus' farewell prayer on behalf of his disciples. How would you summarize this prayer? Note that Jesus is praying for his future disciples as well (17:20). Why does he do this?</p>
<p><b>Saturday John 18:1-27</b> What is the reaction of the arresting party to Jesus' answer, "I am" (see v. 6 and footnote)? Why is so little made of Jesus' trial before the Jewish authorities?</p>	

## Sermon Notes

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**The Spring Bible Academy session begins this week. Some classes meet today.  
You can still register on-line at [www.standrewacademy.org](http://www.standrewacademy.org)**

**Want to grow in your faith? Want to find the life you've always wanted?  
Now is a great time to begin training, not merely trying.**

Perhaps you desire a deeper and more meaningful relationship with God. Maybe you'd like to study the Bible with other Christians in a relaxed and stimulating environment. Maybe you want to help your children succeed in school. Perhaps you are exploring Christianity for the first time. Perhaps you even want to better understand your dreams. For all this and more, the St. Andrew Academy and our faculty are here to help. Make plans now to join us for one or more of these classes. You'll be glad you did.

**Scott's class, *Something More*, meets in Wesley Hall at 9:30 every Sunday.**

If you are not a part of a Sunday morning class, we hope that you'll visit our class. It is open to adults of all ages. Whether you are new to St. Andrew or just visiting, the class is a great way to begin getting connected.

If you have questions, you are welcome to call Scott Engle at 214-291-8009 or e-mail him at [sengle@standrewacademy.org](mailto:sengle@standrewacademy.org).

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection

According to Merriam-Webster, "honor" means "respect and esteem shown to another." We honor someone when we show them that respect and esteem. The Hebrew word used in the Ten Commandments literally means to make one's parents "heavy" - with the respect of their children. We don't live in an honor and shame culture, but the ancients surrounding the Mediterranean did. Nothing mattered as much to the Roman-Greco household as acquiring honor and avoiding shame.

We honor God when we bring glory to God, when we enable others to see God's true and essential character. And the most visible way to honor the Father is to honor the Son (John 5:23; 12:26). Jesus himself provides the ultimate example of what it means to honor God (John 8:49).

In what ways do we honor Jesus and therefore God? How do we show Jesus respect? How do we show God our esteem? In what ways do we dishonor God, failing to show God the respect that is God's due? What do you think unbelievers might have to say about how well we honor Jesus?

How does regular worship attendance honor God? Do you think our worship services show the proper respect to God? How so? In what ways might our own worship participation fail to honor God?