

Pastor Geoffrey R. Boyle  
Funeral for Johnnie Ray Ruble  
20 January 2011  
Grace Lutheran Church, Wichita  
John 10:11-16

*In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit*

Johnnie died too early.  
He was taken much too young.

You're not supposed to die so quickly;  
and you shouldn't have to suffer from cancer.

Your organs should all work properly;  
they shouldn't shut down—  
especially so early!

It's not right;  
it isn't fair;  
this isn't the way it's supposed to be.

And yet, here we are—  
gathered around the remains of a loved one,  
a friend, a co-worker, a colleague,  
a father, a husband, a brother.

We're here because Johnnie left us.

What sort of "Good Shepherd" lets something like this happen?  
There doesn't seem to be anything *good* about it!

What sort of "Good Shepherd" guides by taking away a very good life?  
What sort of "Good Shepherd" allows for death and disease and failing kidneys and livers?  
What sort of "Good Shepherd" takes Johnnie away from us?

Well, to be quite honest, the sort of "Good Shepherd" who does things the way we never would.

Jesus Christ is the "Good Shepherd—"  
He says so Himself! (Jn 10:11)

That means Jesus is the one who guides and leads by way of suffering, illness, and death.  
Jesus is the "Good Shepherd" who took Johnnie too early.

Now let's stop and ask,  
"What makes this Jesus so *good*?"

If *we* were the Shepherd, we'd lead and guide Johnnie into a wonderfully old life.  
We'd make sure his organs worked properly,  
his eyesight perfect,

his body stronger,  
and his personality, well, less stubborn!

If we were the Shepherd we'd avoid danger and evil at all costs!  
We'd make sure there was no suffering, no pain, no sorrow, no death.

If we were Shepherd, we'd get it right—right?

Well, no.

All of this shows that we don't quite understand who we are.  
We don't really believe that we are in fact sinners,  
that we mess up,  
that we *really* mess up,  
that we were messed up right from the get go!

We don't think we deserve any of this;  
and we think pain, sorrow, and death are always bad things, to be avoided at all cost.

What makes Jesus the "Good Shepherd" is that He sees beyond death.  
He sees beyond suffering and pain and sorrow and hurt.  
He knows that unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies,  
it remains alone, and cannot bear fruit! (Jn 12:24)

For this "Good Shepherd" death is actually a good thing.  
In fact, death simply prepares one for life.

Life is what Johnnie now enjoys.  
He has *life* in a way we can't imagine.

The only life *we* know is life marked by sweat and trouble,  
pain and sorrow—  
but not Johnnie!

No, he now understands;  
now he sees;  
everything's clear and bright and healthy and calm.  
Johnnie now knows his Shepherd better than ever before.

Now, Johnnie knows why Jesus is the "Good Shepherd."  
Now he sees how the Shepherd has led him all these years—  
years full of many blessings, yes,  
but also many trials with much suffering.

Jesus is the "Good Shepherd" because He lays down His life for His sheep.  
And Johnnie's one of those sheep.

While we fight against death at all costs;  
 running from pain and suffering;  
 avoiding difficult conversations where we might get hurt—  
 we simply act as a hireling.

You're not the shepherd of your own body.  
 You aren't the master of your domain.  
 You're not captain of your soul.

You're a hired hand,  
 one who flees at the first sound of a wolf,  
 the first threat of suffering and death.

And so it's a good thing that we're not the "Good Shepherd."

But this Jesus,  
 in whom Johnnie put his faith, his trust,  
*He* is the "Good Shepherd."

And what makes Him good?  
 The fact that He lays down His life *for you!*  
 That He guides you and nourishes you and teaches you in the way of His own suffering.

You are the sheep just as much as Johnnie is His sheep.  
 You're the sheep constantly going astray,  
 constantly wandering off,  
 constantly in fear and danger of the many wolves out there—  
 and rather than running and hiding and avoiding the danger of the wolves,  
 Jesus takes them head on—He's the "Good Shepherd."

And rather than pulling out a big sword or sling or handgun,  
 Jesus guards the sheep and defeats the wolves by *dying*—  
 by giving *Himself* to the wolves, rather than the sheep,  
 satisfying their hunger.

Jesus is the "Good Shepherd" because He lays down His life for the sheep.

And because He lays down His life,  
 because He goes the way of suffering and mocking and scourging and crucifying—  
 because He goes the way of death, the way of the cross—  
 you, the sheep, get to keep your life,  
 and so does Johnnie,  
 because by His death on the cross, Jesus defeats death.

Johnnie's with the "Good Shepherd,"  
 he's with his Lord, Jesus Christ.

There's now no division, no separation, no struggle, or hiddenness, or confusion—  
 Johnnie now knows the “Good Shepherd” face to face,  
 he knows Jesus Christ as that Shepherd.

But for us, there's still pain and sorrow and confusion.  
 There's still the temptation to find *another* way, *another* shepherd, *another* God.

But as Johnnie knows well,  
 and as he confessed clearly before he left us,  
 there is no God, no shepherd, no way apart from Jesus Christ.

You cannot know God, even the Father, without or apart from this Jesus.  
 You can't call upon Him, pray to Him, or hope to receive anything from Him,  
 unless it's Jesus who Shepherds the way.

And this isn't a Jesus who avoids suffering or death—  
 it's a Jesus with nail-pierced hands, a bloody side, and a heavy cross.

And it's this suffering Jesus,  
 this crucified Shepherd,  
 who loves you, His sheep.

He lays down His life for you,  
 for Johnnie,  
 for the entire world.

And now He feeds His sheep.  
 He guides and leads and cares for them,  
 by giving His own body and blood for them to eat and drink.

He forgives them.  
 He takes away their sin and sorrow and death.  
 And He gives them Himself.

The Lord's Supper was one of the last meals Johnnie enjoyed in this world.  
 He ate the body and blood of Christ for his forgiveness and life—  
 and yes, Johnnie knew full well,  
 that it was the slain body and blood of the “Good Shepherd.”

He knew this Shepherd to be Jesus,  
 and so he followed Him right into His Church,  
 right into that community led and nourished by the “Good Shepherd,”  
 who lays down His life for His sheep.

*In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit*