

Pastor Geoffrey R. Boyle
Funeral for Oliver O. Riffel
18 January 2012
Grace Lutheran Church, Wichita
John 10:11-16

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

1. Olie the Sheep

Olie was, by no means, *sheepish*—
he wasn't timid or fearful;
he didn't seem all that shy or embarrassed to make a mistake—
he wasn't *sheepish*; but he was a sheep!

He was made a sheep a long, long time ago when he was baptized into the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Baptism marked him as a sheep,
one of the fold.

But as you know sheep tend to wander.
They get into all sorts of trouble.
They do their own thing,
pay attention to their own nose,
and sometimes end up places where they shouldn't.

That's just how sheep are—
and so that's also how Olie was.
That's how all the baptized are—
we wander.

But it's not the wandering that's the problem—
for even a cheap, hired-hand will easily draw us back from the edges and bring us home.

2. Here Comes the Wolf!

The problem of wandering is when we meet the wolves.

A wolf has no plans to use the sheep well—
he wants only to steal, kill, and destroy.

The wolf scatters the flock,
he drives them away from each other,
away from the support and help of the other,
he tries to get at each sheep alone—
where they're helpless, defenseless, and will make for a good meal.

As a sheep, you're bound to have many wolves come your way.

Many wolves came for Olie throughout his life.
Some left their scars, others caused pain only the heart can feel.

But for Olie, the last wolf was an attack on his body,
an attack on his blood.

3. The Good Shepherd

But thanks be to God there was and is a Shepherd for Olie!

And not just any shepherd, not a hireling, not a cheap day-jobber,
but the Good Shepherd.

Olie knew this Shepherd was with him all along.
He knew the wolves could only do so much and no more.
He knew that his Shepherd was Good, and faithful, and cared for him.

Olie knew the Good Shepherd is Jesus,
because that's what Jesus said:
"I am the Good Shepherd" (Jn 10:11).

But what makes this Shepherd Good so strange, so otherworldly.
This shepherd isn't good because he's the tallest or most agile;
it's not that He's armed with the most powerful artillery or has built the highest fences.
What makes this Shepherd *good* is that "He lays down His life for His sheep" (Jn 10:11).

When the wolves attack, they don't get to sink their teeth into the sheep—
they sink them into the Shepherd.

Olie's Shepherd was the one who led His flock best by calling all wolves to Himself.

As this Jesus made His way to Calvary, to the place of the cross,
he pleaded for all wolves to come, for none to be left behind, for each to sink his
venomous teeth into the Shepherd's flesh—
Jesus was crucified and died and suffered the attack of all the wolves,
all for the sake of His sheep.

Even Olie's last wolf, that wolf that attacked his body and his blood,
that wolf too was taken care of by Christ—
who's body was broken and who's blood was shed for Olie.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd because He lays down His life for His sheep.
And that means Olie;
that means *you*.

4. The Sheep's Delight

And because of what this Shepherd did for Olie,
this Good Shepherd laying down His life on the cross,
Olie was full of joy.

Even towards the end, whenever you asked how Olie was doing he'd respond:

"Terrible!"

But he did it with a grin of pure joy.

He also invited you into this joy as well.

He wanted you to respond with something like,

"Well, I guess there's always room for improvement!"

But where does this joy come from when wolves attack, when the body hurts, when the mind wanders, and when life seems too much?

For Olie, at least, this joy came from the Lord!

It came from the Good Shepherd.

It came from the God who sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die and rise for *all!*

For Olie, this joy came from the presence of the Lord,

from hearing His word,

from singing His praises,

from receiving the very body and blood of the crucified Shepherd!

For Olie, joy came from our Lord's many gifts, from His promises to save and heal and deliver.

And he couldn't have picked or more fitting Confirmation verse all those years ago:

"Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart" (Ps 37:4).

This *delight* is a word of Joy, a word of faith and hope and trust in the promise of Christ!

Here's a little more from that Psalm:

"Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrongdoers!

For they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb.

Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness.

Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart.

Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him, and He will act.

He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday"

(Ps 37:1-6)

And so Olie did.

He was the sheep that trusted His Shepherd.

He knew that even when wolves attacked,

the Lord would act,

He would bring forth His saving light,

and He would save Olie.

And so he will do for you as well.

O Sheep, you have a Good Shepherd—

Jesus Christ, who lays down His life *for you!*

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