



## CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

Good morning. Good morning, and thank you, Father Bill, for such a wonderful, wonderful introduction. I am so glad to be in God's house with God's people on such a wonderful, wonderful occasion. Thank you to everyone who has embraced me and made me feel like I'm home. And of course, Armani hearing you on the piano and singing. I've known him since he was a kid along with my kid, and so I may be dating myself. Don't try to calculate my age.

All right, so I thank God for using me and for choosing me in spite of me. And so this morning I come before you as we celebrate the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. And I believe that it is just befitting to take time and reflect on who we are as children of God. Certainly Dr. King knew who he was, even when society and his systems tried to define him, tried to label him, tried to stigmatize him. He did not acquiesce because he understood that his identity was not determined by man, but by God.

And so Dr. King, he dreamed. He dreamed that one day all people of all races, of all nationalities, of all genders, that we would all come together and live together and work together, be educated together, worship together, and not be identified or treated based on perceived immutable factors like the color of our skin or the identity of our parents, the neighborhoods we grew up in, the schools we attend, job descriptions and educational achievements.

And I believe, I just believe that so much time and money has been spent on research designed to define and label and identify people, because who I am will always dictate what I believe, and what I believe will determine how I behave. And so Dr. King knew who he was and he believed in equality for everybody. And his belief dictated his behavior. He stood up, he marched, he protested, and he even died because his belief dictated his behavior.

And so on this morning, the gospel or the message that I want to give to you comes from Psalms 23. And Armani sung it on this morning because we have to know that we are who God says that we are. And so every day I make sure I remind myself I am who God says that I am. Because if I don't know who I am and I can just be transparent for a moment, I have made so many decisions and engaged in many behaviors that were because of my erroneous belief about who I am, based on what other people said that I am, and based on what other people said I could do. People who told me I could never go to college because of where

I lived and because of my family dynamics. People who tried to plant a seed in me that I could never be anything other than a janitor or maybe just maybe a police officer. Boy are they disappointed on today?

And so listen, I understand that if I want to know something about something or something about anything, I must rely on the categorical experts. And so when I want to know about the stars and the moon and constellations, I rely on scientists. When I want to know something about a car, I really don't want to know much about a car, but if I do, I rely on the words of a mechanic. When I want to know something about animals, I will look to a veterinarian. But when I want to know something about me and who I am, I go to the expert, and that is the one who created me. That is God the father, and His word says that I am beautiful. His word says that I am the righteousness of God. His word says that I am forgiven. His word says that I am restored, that I am redeemed. His word says that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

And so at a very young age, I learned to not listen to who everybody else said that I am, but to listen to what God says about me. And so today I just want to focus for a little bit on our role, what God says about us. In Psalm 23, he says that we are sheep. It says that the Lord is my shepherd, and if God is my shepherd, and God is your shepherd, then all those who proclaim to be followers of Jesus Christ, guess what? We are sheep.

And in fact, the Bible, all throughout the Bible, believers are consistently referred to as God's sheep. If you look in Psalms 100, we are identified as the people of God and the sheep of his pasture. If we look in 1 Peter, the fifth chapter, believers are referred to as the flock of God. Even in Matthew, the 10th chapter, Jesus says, I am sending you out like sheep. So as believers, as Christians, as those who are saved by the shedding of the blood of our precious Lamb, then we are sheep. And I hope that on today you will leave here and discard everything that the world has given you as an identity and be who God says that you are: sheep.

And we've all heard that statement, that knowledge is power. And so as I've matured, I've grown to understand that the more I know about who I am, the more I understand that I need God to rule and to lead and to guide in my life. And if knowledge is really power, and God identifies us as sheep, in order to know who I am, and in order for you to really embrace who you are, you have to understand the characteristics of sheep, and so I'm going to share just a few of those characteristics with you.

First of all, sheep have great peripheral vision, but they have poor depth of sight. To sheep, things will appear to be one way when really they are another. Sheep will go after and they'll draw close to what looks good but when they get up close or they get in it, they see that things are not as they appear. And that's why

Matthew the seventh chapter, verse number 15, refers to those who will come to you as wolf in sheep clothing

As sheep, if you are sheep, and we are, because that's who God says we are, we can be easily fooled by what our eyes see. We are predisposed to see only what we want to see, if we're really honest. The grass always looks greener on the other side and if we would be honest with ourselves, nobody's looking, just do a self inventory. We have seen the other side and we thought the grass was greener. And what we failed to realize is that it takes fertilizer to make that grass green. And you know what fertilizer is? And so we got over to the other side and we realized that the grass was greener only because they had more fertilizer on that side, and then we longed for home.

That's what we do as sheep. Sheep are prone to go the wrong way and are unaware of the dangers around them. That's why Isaiah 5 and 36 tells us that all we like sheep have gone astray. I wish that I could tell you that all the wonderful things that Father Bill said is that I dropped out of Heaven and onto Earth at 2234 East Belden Street, and I did all of those wonderful things, but that's really not my whole resume because I'm a sheep, right? And I have gone astray. Listen, thanks be to God that He is my Shepherd and even when I go astray, I can still be a part of the fold. And so sheep, they will go astray, they will mess up. But thanks be to God for His grace and His mercy and His love, and His forgiveness.

As sheep, we too often go along on our daily routines, and when you think about it, one of the characteristics of sheep is that not only are they prone to go the wrong way, but they are unaware of dangers. And sometimes we too, we go through life and we are not prepared. We're unaware of the things that are out there. The Bible tells us that Satan, he's going to and fro looking for whom he may devour. And so that's why we have to have a prayer life. That's why even when it's four degrees outside and it's cold and everybody wants to stay home wrapped up in their blankets, we still have to press our way to hear the word of God so that we are not prone to and unaware of the dangers that are out there.

Another characteristic of sheep is that they remember things and people, especially painful situations. They can remember things for up to four years. And their vivid memory of things will cause them to remain in a rut unless and until they are led to new pastures. And that's why the word of God tells us that we ought to forget those things that are behind us and to press forward. Because as sheep, sometimes we remember things and we hold on to them. And we stand by and we allow past hurts, and we allow past pains to disappoint us and to keep us in bondage. And sometimes we find ourselves in a rut. We can't go forward and we can't go backwards because we're remembering the things that happened on yesterday. And so as sheep, we get caught in a rut.

And then here's one on sheep, if you didn't know, that they are considered to be some of the dumbest animals of all. Did you know that? Somebody's saying, well, I'm not a sheep? Well, they are, and if we are honest with ourselves, at least I'll be honest with me. But for the Spirit of God dwelling within me, even in the body of Christ, there are times that I have opened my mouth and I've said some of the dumbest things, and I've had to step back and ask myself, did I really just say that? That's one of my sheep characteristics.

Listen, sheep, this is the last one I'll tell you about. Sheep, they have an excellent sense of smell and they even have scent glands on their feet. And despite their keen sense of smell, they have difficulty smelling themselves, but they are better able to smell everybody else. I knew it would get quiet right there. Listen, sheep are smelly animals. They are outside in the elements all day and they stink really, really badly. And despite the fact that they stink, sheep will stick together and they will stay together in the pen. Sheep recognize that while my stench may be a little bit stronger than your stench, all of us stink, but we are stronger together than we are apart.

Sheep realize that life is just one big sheep pen. I'm in it and you are in it because we belong to God who is our Shepherd. We can't really turn up our noses at anyone else because they smell. We do it, but we shouldn't. Yes, they stink. Yes, they have faults. Yes, they have sins. Yes, they have flaws. But the reality is that you smell too, and as sheep, it's just easier to smell somebody else's stuff and not your own. But remember that God, the good shepherd, that he smells it all.

So with a few characteristics that I've just shared with you about sheep, why in the world would God want us to be sheep? Anybody asking that question? Anybody has opted out already? Somebody saying, no, I'd rather be a chicken. At least I just peck around all day. Or maybe I'll be a ram and I'll go and kick and tear up some stuff in a China shop. Why would God refer to us or call us as sheep? Sheep, they can't see. They're prone to mess up. They go the wrong way. They have memory that will keep them in a rut, and they're the dumbest animals of all. And to top it off, they stink.

Well, there's absolutely nothing wrong with being sheep as long as you have a good shepherd. See, there's nothing wrong with being sheep as long as you follow the Good Shepherd. I know that sheep have a lot of apparent deficiencies, but God has prescribed a measure of grace for each deficiency that sheep have. And that means that God has prescribed a measure of faith for each one of us. Sheep have poor eyesight, but God's grace says, listen, you walk by faith and not by sight.

Sheep are prone to go the wrong way and are unaware of danger, but because of God's grace, He has encamped His angels all around us to protect us and to keep

us from danger seen and unseen. Sheep remember hurtful things that can keep them in a rut, but God's grace says, I'll keep you in perfect peace if you keep your mind stayed on Me. Sheep are the dumbest of all, but God's grace says if you lack wisdom, just ask me for it and I'll give it to you liberally. And sheep stink but God's grace says, I'll make you holy, cleansing you by washing you with water through the Word.

When you believe that you are who you are and you believe what God says about you, and you believe that God's grace and mercy is available to you, then you understand and you begin to enjoy the benefits that are attached to your identity. And here are some of those benefits that sheep have. The first benefit is that I shall not want. As sheep, God gives us everything that we need according to His will. That means that I lack nothing, and that's why Dr. Martin Luther King could grow up in a poor neighborhood with poor parents and poor situations and haters all around him because he knew who he was and he knew that God was his shepherd and he understood that the benefit of being a sheep with a shepherd like God is that he would lack nothing.

I want to suggest to you on today that you lack nothing. You may not have everything that you want, but if you really sit back and do an inventory of your life, you are not lacking anything. Another benefit that we have as sheep who belong to God is that he leads us besides still waters. Sheep can't see well, but they hear exceptionally well. John 10 and 27 tells us that my sheep listen to my voice. I know them and they follow me. When the storms of life are raging, because I'm His sheep, I don't have to look at the storm with my eyes. All I have to do is listen to the shepherd's voice as He leads me through the storm. And that's why the Word of God says that faith comes by hearing the Word of God. And so when we go through the storms of life, instead of focusing in on the storms, I dare you to be sheep and use your ears so that you can hear the father say, the Shepherd say, child, I'm with you all the way.

Another benefit that sheep have is that the shepherd leads us into the path of righteousness. Listen, the shepherd will always lead us to do what's right even when everybody else is doing what's wrong. The Bible says that every step of a good man, and I'm going to throw in a good woman too, they are ordered by God. And so if we listen, He will lead us into the path of righteousness.

Another benefit that we have is that we don't have to be afraid. You don't have to fear anything because God is with us and nothing can separate us from the love of God, not even death. Which is incredible. I don't have to fear. In fact, the 23rd Psalm says the shadow of death, and you know what a shadow is? A shadow is just a dark reflection of something. It's really not that thing, it is just a reflection of it. And it's such a good feeling to know that even when my time is up on this earth, I don't have to be afraid.

Death is just a shadow. A shadow can't really do you anything. A shadow can't do you anything at all. But I don't have to be afraid. Why? Because God is with me. Not only is He with me, but He has His rod as my Shepherd to fight off my enemies. And He has His staff. And here's the wonderful thing that I love about that staff. It has the hook on the end of it so that when I fall off a cliff, and notice I said when I didn't say if. I didn't say I might fall off a cliff. There have been times in my life where I have fallen off the cliff, but I thank God that as the good shepherd, He will leave the 99 sheep and come looking for me, little old me and He will take that staff and He will pull me in back into the fold.

Another benefit that we have as sheep is, although I can't see what is behind me, the Good Shepherd has my back because it says His goodness and His mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. And I don't know about you, but that excites me because I've gone some places where but for the goodness and mercy of God, I would not be standing before you on today. I have lived in some neighborhoods, but for the goodness and the mercy of God that had my back, I wouldn't be able to do the things that I'm able to do in life. It's all because of His goodness and His mercy.

And here's the one that really, really excites me, that even when my life is over, as sheep, my future and your future is secure in God because it says that I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. And I don't know about you on a day like today, although I just want Heaven to know I'm not trying to get home to Heaven very early. I still have at least a good 50 left in me for those that are trying to calculate my age. I'm going to throw a big number out there. I have at least another 50 left in me. But what does excite me is that when this life is over, I'm going to dwell in the presence of a mighty, mighty God all the days the rest of my life in eternity. And it says forever. And guess what? Forever is a really, really long time. And I don't know about you, there's not anything else I can think of that I want to do forever other than to dwell in the presence of a mighty God.

And so I am so glad that I have lived long enough to know who I am. I am who God says I am, and God says that we are His sheep. And I'm so glad that I know not only who I am, but I know who I belong to. I belong to the Good Shepherd, and you belong to the Good Shepherd. And because of who God says I am and because of who He is, that means that we have all of the benefits that go along with being sheep and having the Good Shepherd.

And so on today, I just want you, as you celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. and all of his accomplishments, to just remember that we are who God says that we are. Not what society says, not what someone else has spoken over our lives, but we are who God says that we are. And because we are who God says that we are, then we have to act like it. We have to treat each other like it. We have to love like it. We've got to give like it.

I love all of the wonderful celebrations on Martin Luther King's birthday and everybody's going out to do things. I think it's wonderful, but what is it going to look like next week? What will be your legacy of love next week? Because that's what he represented, a legacy of love, a legacy of sacrifice, a legacy that even if my name is not in lights, I'm still going to help somebody along the way. I'm still going to love somebody along the way. I'm still going to forgive somebody along the way. I'm still going to reach down and help someone and not kick them in the face while they're down on the ground.

He left a legacy of love and, listen, isn't that the same thing that Jesus Christ did for us? He left a legacy of love. He took off divinity and He put on humanity and He said, listen, instead of sending Shannon to the cross, instead of sending you to the cross and you to the cross to die for man's sins, He said, I'll go in their place. It's their sin, but I'll go in their place.

That's something that really overwhelms me because I have seven brothers and sisters, and my mom used to do corporal discipline, and so when one person did wrong, she'd just save it up until the end of the week because she knew eventually all of us would mess up. Right? Because we are all sheep. And so we all got a spanking right down the line. She just went down the line and she got us all. And I know y'all looking like her mama spanked her? Yes. That's why I'm here today because my mama spanked me. If she didn't, I don't know where I'd be.

But listen, I'm the baby and by the time she would get to me, she would be tired. And they would get mad because I never got what they got. I only got like one or two little licks and I got a lot of fussing because she was out of breath by the time you take care of eight children. I have never once in my life said I'll go first with my whipping so that I can spare my other seven brothers and sisters, but that's what Jesus did for us. He said, wait a minute. I know I'm in Heaven and I know that I'm the Son of God and I know that I am divinity. But guess what? I'll get in Velma's lineup and instead of her starting with Jason, she'll start with Me. I'll be the first to take that whipping and I'll take the whipping and I'll take it for everybody that's in line. And that's because He was leaving a legacy of love and a legacy of sacrifice.

And so I want each of you all to think about what will be my legacy of love? If I am a sheep, if I am God's sheep, if God is my shepherd, what will be my legacy of love? And if you can't think of anything, can you just start with something small? Go and scrape the snow off of somebody's car. Go and help somebody to bring them a meal. Go and call somebody on the phone that you know they're by themselves. And just let them know that God loves you and God is thinking about you, because all of us can do something to leave a legacy of love.

And I'm so glad that Jesus's legacy did not just end with Him coming to earth and taking my place. But the Bible says that that legacy of love went all the way to the

grave. That legacy of love got sealed in a tomb. But on the third day, that legacy of love, He rose from the dead. And that's why I'm here today. Yeah, I'm here because my mama spanked me and I'm here because, you know, God kept His hand on me. But the reality is, I'm here because of Jesus's legacy of love. And so God bless you, and may the peace of God be with you forever.

Amen.