

## Pastor Jamie's Sermon

**Good Shepherd Church, April 26, 2026**  
**"Following Christ"**

### The Message

I love both of our scripture passages today because they each give me hope in different ways, and they both evoke "good" feelings, for different reasons.

In our passage from Acts, it sounds so lovely to be able to enjoy the simplicity of living a life devoted to Jesus.

They broke bread and prayed together, they shared everything they had with each other, they sold their property and possessions so there was nothing to be concerned about, they gave their money to those in need, while their group kept growing.

Certainly if we think about how this would work practically in today's world, we would have some big questions.

But it allows us to wonder together what it might be like to live in a community like that. Things and possessions become unimportant, keeping up with the neighbours is not a concern, and caring for one another, praying together, and breaking bread together is all that matters.

It sounds nice in a way – simple, uncomplicated, and joyful.

Likewise, our Gospel passage today also gives off "good" feelings.

This passage reminds us of several things, but important for today's purposes is this idea that the shepherd knows each sheep by name.

Not only does the shepherd know the sheep by name, but the shepherd *calls* each sheep by name, and leads them out of the pasture.

The sheep know the shepherd's voice, and they know they are loved and cared for because the shepherd knows them each by name.

Being known by name is important, but often we don't know just how important it is until we notice an experience we have – either positive or negative.

For example, a couple weeks ago, I took my dogs to the boarding facility to stay for a few nights.

As I was in the lobby checking them in, a staff person walked in to start their shift. They hadn't dropped their things off yet, and they hadn't looked at the list of dogs arriving that day.

But this person walked in, looked at my dogs and said "Oh, hey, Kanyon and Lacey!"

I had never met this staff person before, and my dogs don't go to this facility very often, so I honestly assumed they didn't really know my dogs all that well.

I was completely surprised that this person knew who my dogs were. They hadn't been there in months, and this is a fairly large facility.

But I'll admit, it felt great to know that the staff knew my dogs, even though they are "infrequent flyers" at this facility.

And truthfully, I shouldn't have been surprised at all. After owning a facility like that one, I know that all my staff knew every dog, no matter how often they were there.

And yet, it still struck me as a very pleasant surprise that the "shepherd" knew my dogs ("the sheep").

It felt good, actually.

Similarly, I recently talked with a man at the gym who I'd seen there many times before but had never actually met.

I introduced myself because we often said hello to each other, but had never spoken beyond that.

He introduced himself as Cliff, which was easy for me to remember because I know another Cliff.

I told him my name, we chatted for a couple minutes, and we moved on with our days.

A few weeks later, I said hello again and confirmed that his name was Cliff, and I was floored that he remembered my name, too. I didn't expect that at all.

Most of the time when you meet someone, you don't expect that they'll remember your name in the future.

Often people will say something like "I'm not good with names." And most of us are OK with that.

But, it feels great when someone *does* remember our name, doesn't it?

It's a pleasant surprise.

So, I offer these examples as a way for us to think about the magnitude of what it means for our shepherd – for Jesus – to know us each by name.

And, more importantly, for Jesus to *call* us each by name.

It sure makes it easier for us to want to follow someone if they know us by name. If we feel called, individually and uniquely, by our Shepherd, it gives us a sense of feeling loved and cared for.

It's not just knowing that we are loved and cared for, but it's actually *feeling* that we are loved and cared for. When we *feel* loved, it's much easier to know with certainty that we *are* loved.

So, this brings me around to the Acts passage and this sense of community that this passage describes.

The passage we heard begins by saying "they were like family to each other."

Families *know* each other's names. They *call* one another by name. Often, families even have "pet" names, or nicknames that they use – names of love and endearment.

This community shared everything they had *joyfully* and without complaint.

They willingly, happily sacrificed the "things" of their world to be together in community, to break bread and pray together, and to care for one another and for those in need.

I have to imagine that a huge part of this community's ability to do this was the fact that they were individually, uniquely called by name to follow and serve with and for Jesus.

So, I wonder what this might mean for us today. How do we translate this into something meaningful in today's world?

If Jesus returned in our time and place, what would following him look like?

We live in a world in which giving up all of our possessions would be a real challenge to human survival.

We no longer live in a communal society. So what might Jesus encourage if he was here with us today?

What does following Jesus mean in a totally different world than the one in which the Apostles lived?

Knowing and *feeling* that we are called by name and wholly loved and cared for is a great start.

As you leave here today, I would encourage you to take these lessons with you, wonder about them, and ponder these ideas.

Have conversations with one another about what it means to be called by name, and what it might mean to “give up everything” (perhaps not literally) to follow Jesus.

These conversations are important for those of us who follow and love Jesus and define ourselves as Christian.

They are important because we are called by name to continue learning, growing, and wondering together.

We are called to this community – to break bread together, to serve together, to love and care for one another, and to be in conversation, joyfully and hopefully.

So, I invite you to think about these questions together as we “break bread” together during fellowship time today.

It is reminiscent of Isaiah 43:1:

The Lord says, “I have called you by name. You are mine.”

I don’t know about you all, but to me, that feels like good, good news. That feels like the Love we all crave and deserve.

Amen.

Let us pray:

God in heaven, we come before you today wondering how we can take to heart what Jesus and his Apostles called us to do in light of today’s societal expectations. We pray that you would guide us closer to you, and help us to hear you as you call us each by name. We are grateful, O God, for this beloved community that we are a part of, and we ask that you continue to support this community and watch over us, helping us to remain faithful to you and loving to one another. In your holy and gracious name, we pray. Amen.