

THE SHEPHERD WHO GATHERS THE SCATTERED +++

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Good morning, church. It is so great to be gathered together. And as we conclude this series, I pray that you realize that we're not alone. And today, we're gonna discover we're not alone because we're known, because we're gathered, and because we're protected. And so today, everywhere, we are gonna see what it is to be under the life, the knowledge, the gathering, and the protection of our Good Shepherd, Jesus, and of one another.

You know, as I was preparing for this message, I was reflecting and I thought about a guy who has the best sports name I think I've heard. I mean, it's just one of those iconic names where when he was born, you can't help but think the doctor was like, this guy's gotta be an athlete. Teddy Bridgewater. I mean, just this wonderful name. Now, Teddy didn't go on to become an amazing athlete, but he was really good. He was a career quarterback number two, backup quarterback in the NFL. He played for probably the best NFL team throughout the history, the Detroit Lions, for a few years. I don't see what was funny about that. And he had a few times starting, but what Teddy was really becoming known for was when he retired.

You know that dream that we all have that you can retire when you're 28? And he retired. Now, he didn't go on to do what most would do in retirement out of the NFL, find a really sweet, cushy broadcasting job, head into some sort of analysis of college or something else on game day. He didn't go and say, well, I'm going to go become a college coach, or I'm going to become an NFL quarterback coach and work my way up to someday becoming a head coach. No, what Teddy did is Teddy moved back to his hometown in a poor area of Florida, and he became his alma mater high school head coach. And they went on to become a really good team.

But what Teddy was also really good at was the one day when he finished up practice with this team, and he saw one of his players hanging out outside the field, just waiting. And it wasn't a starter. It was just a role player. And he said, Hey, man, what's going on? He said, Oh, my mom's running late. Not sure when she'll be able to get here. She had to keep working for a little bit.

And Teddy didn't say, I'll wait with you. He said, Why don't I take you home? And on their car ride home, Teddy began to ask questions. How are you doing? How's your mom doing? How's family life? How's school going? And what he discovered was he discovered that this student athlete lived at home with a single mom in an impoverished neighborhood. That there were times where being alone at home was scary for his siblings. That they didn't always know where their next meal would come from. And that life was hard.

What Teddy also discovered was that this student's story wasn't the only story. That his teammates had the same stories. Had the same everyday struggles. And Teddy was different because he immediately let this player know that he wasn't just a coach and this player wasn't just another number or another

player filling a roster spot. That this coach cared for him. And isn't that what we all want? We want to be a part of a community that is known.

And to know that you're not alone means to be completely known. This is why it's so important for us to be known by our names. It's why we like to be known by our names. I want you to think about for a minute one of the greatest shows of all time. I'm not going to have another office reference, but a show that I think is even better. If you recall, for some of you that are over 40 years old like me, you'll remember this great iconic show entitled Seinfeld. And in the show Seinfeld, there was one episode, one of my favorite episodes ever, where Kramer had the great idea to get everybody in New York City to wear name tags. And it turned and transformed an entire city of New York, hardened, rude, crude, fast-moving people into, for that time on that show, kind people. Nice people that knew each other's names.

It's why the great theme song of one of the most iconic shows, and again now you have to probably be over 50 and over 60 to really remember the show or seeing the show live and not in syndication, Cheers, the theme song where everybody knows your name. And across all campuses, as the great George Wendt used to walk in, if you know, people would shout, Amen, right? Because they knew his name. That's what it is to be known. And we crave to be known. And that's why we have a community that is known, right?

When you see words in yellow, say them after me.

From John 10, 3 through 4: "The gatekeeper opens the gate for him and the sheep, listen to his voice, he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he brought out his own, he goes on ahead of them. And his sheep follow him because they know his voice."

"I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me."

Here's what we learn right away about being known by Jesus. Notice this, he doesn't just manage his sheep. He doesn't just say, yeah, my job is to get this flock from point A to point B. I'm just going to, got to get you in the crowd all together in order to get into heaven. He knows your name. He knows you deeply and personally, intimately. Your voice is his most important voice that he hears.

Our faith relationship is not about attendance, but Christianity is about a relationship. I was hearing about someone who's not a Christian, but who's so intrigued by the Christian message because their faith background talks about a way, a way of living. And they said, you know what I really am intrigued about with Christianity is you have a relationship with God that's foreign and that's unique. And it is unique because we have a relationship built on grace, built on love. We're not a part of a mass. We're not just a group that's gathered. You are called by name. Your name was called.

You see, isolation often whispers, no one really knows me, but Jesus proudly declares, I know you completely. I know you. I care for you. Your name is on my lips, on my heart, and I speak it to my father. He knows you. So now I want to invite you to listen for his voice.

And it is so important for us current friends. I think, I think that we get so wrapped up in the hustle and bustle. And I think that we lose sight of the fact that the God who spoke through the scriptures is the God who still speaks today. And he spoke to his people. Then he'll speak to you.

I have the privilege of at least two times in my life, clearly discerning that the Lord spoke to me. And I, without a doubt, without a question, know that it was God who spoke to me. And you might be saying, well, how do I know when the voice of the Lord—first of all, when the Lord speaks to you, you will know there will be no question in your mind. But second, there's a few ways.

First, in your worship, and not just on a Sunday worship, but in your daily worship, where you're at, when you're putting yourself in a very throne room of God, do not miss the fact that God's going to speak to you.

Second, in the word, the word is a revealed word of God, where he has spoken in that. And so what I want to invite you to do is as you read the word, take a moment when you read your scripture, take a moment, not only to comprehend what is this scripture say, but honestly ask God and say, Lord, what is this scripture saying to me right now? And then be silent.

And third, listen for his voice in your sacred space. This doesn't necessarily mean that you have to have like a prayer closet, and maybe you do. This doesn't mean that you need, need like a kneeler or an altar area in your home, but maybe you do. I can tell you the one, one of the times where the Lord clearly spoke to me was in a sacred space of me and my first condo running on my treadmill in the basement. And it was a sacred space because I was worshiping God while I was running. I was talking with God about things that were on my mind and my heart. And then God clearly spoke and my treadmill stopped because I listened.

And I'd also invite you to take that moment because you can't follow a voice that you're not slowing down to hear. This week, I want to challenge you to slow down, to hear the voice of God, find a moment where you can just stop and pause in your prayer and in your conversation time, and do something that I haven't even figured out how to do yet, but I want you to do. And that's what I continue to strive to do. And that's where, like, turn off your own thoughts. Like, like try to say right now, I'm not even going to think.

That little voice in your head, say, be silent and let the voice of the Lord fill it instead. Because he knows you and he knows your name. You are known by him. He wants to speak to you.

And that moves us into our second point: being known by God. He then makes us a community that is gathered, right? And when we're gathered, we become one. And that means we're for one another. We're with one another.

I want to share with you about a team that, that I hate. I don't like them at all. It's the New England Patriots. And I joined, I'm with 99.9% of Americans who also hate them. But here's what I will say. They really have a great winning culture. And I was seeing that that culture isn't just on the field. It's off the field and it's beyond their careers.

At the Tom Brady roast, there was a moment where one of the people who was making the roast made a joke about the owner, Robert Kraft, and Tom Brady in the middle of the roast in front of 50 million people watching it just said, Hey, off limits, don't ever make that joke again.

Another time was Josh McDaniel, who was also on one of the Super Bowl winning teams. And he was on the team that also had lost to the New York Giants. He was the head coach of the Raiders. And one of his assistant coaches was Antonio Pierce. And he had asked Antonio Pierce to speak to the team before a big game that they were having. And Antonio Pierce shared about their mentality and how they went in as the New York Giants and beat the New England Patriots. And he shared how they, they got into their minds mentally, how they got into their team, how they got into them during the game, and how they totally disrupted the flow of the game. And he challenged his team to do that.

And after the meeting, Josh McDaniel called Pierce aside and said, I never want you to share or speak about that story again. You will not embarrass the Patriots to anybody else. Their culture is that we are together. They are a community that is always gathered and never alone.

In John 10, 12 through 13: "A hired hand is not the shepherd and does not know the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and he runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and he cares nothing about the sheep."

"But I have other sheep that are not of this pen and I must bring them also. And they too will listen to my voice and there shall be one flock and one shepherd."

A hired hand, someone that doesn't care. They don't care. When the going gets tough, they get going. The wolf seeks to isolate and destroy you. But the shepherd, the shepherd seeks to gather his flock, to gather his people from all over and everywhere and bring them together.

You see, the cross is the gathering point of the scattered of Jesus Christ. It is where Christ gives everything for one another, for you and for me. And it is where we come and we see that we're not saved from our sin. We are saved to be in everlasting and eternal life and community gathered forever. That's what he saved us to.

And so you and I, as a community that gathered, build then the culture that Jesus builds for us today. That we stay with the flock. We stay with one another. And here's what we need to do to remain in the flock and to say that we're not alone as a community that is gathered.

Resist the quiet wanderings. Meaning where we just kind of drift away a little bit or we just wander. And one of the things I would say to really resist, resist the social media experts that put some sort of minute to a minute and a half reel together about some sort of little tiny thread that they want to say is true about the scripture. And in 90 seconds, they've deconstructed your entire faith as some sort of social media expert. They're nothing.

Resist following away a little person who's just trying to build an audience. And stay rooted in the word and in a community that actually cares for you, that knows you. And show up consistently. Do what we've done. Get here even on the worst day of 365 days when someone's bright idea was to move our clocks forward an hour. Like you showed up. And that's a consistent effort.

It's showing to our kids that there's not a question, are we going to church? It's when we get home from church. This is what we do.

And then this is the hard part, especially for men. Men hear this, men hear this, let people know you and walk with you. There's no bravado in not being vulnerable. I would actually say by not being vulnerable, it shows cowardice. Because authentically, every human being needs one another. Because spiritual maturity isn't independence. It's interdependence under Jesus. It's who we're called to be.

And that's because we're also a community that is protected by sacrifice. So this past year, Teddy Bridgewater, whose teams had won multiple state titles, Teddy was fired for breaking a rule. And all the state titles, because he broke this rule, were revoked from his team. And I know what you're thinking. The same thing most of the country is thinking. Great, here's another Michigan coach just doing all the wrong things in order to get a title.

And that's not true. Because what Teddy was doing, because what Teddy was found guilty of, and he said, I did, and I would do it again, was his players that were impoverished, he would send them Uber Eats and DoorDashes on the weekend so that their families would have meals. When he found out that they didn't have rides to practice games, that he would then give them, send Ubers to pick them up. That he would buy them clothing and pay for team dinners and leftovers to take home. And this was considered breaking the rules. But he was protecting his team and his players because he knew them more than just a team. They were a people in need. They were his sheep.

And this year, the state of Florida passed the Teddy Bridgewater Act, which now says that any coach, K through 12, can donate up to \$15,000 of their personal money to their team for whatever they need.

You see, we have a Good Shepherd who's protecting you.

John 10, 11, through 17 and 18 as well: "I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and the authority to take it up. This is the command I receive from my Father."

The Good Shepherd will protect you, and his authority is actually for you. He's been given the authority to give up his life for you, and that's what he does. He protects you by taking away anything that would destroy you, no matter who you are, where you've been, or what you've done.

This is the Good Shepherd's good news for you.

And so we, together, as the sheep, we support our fellow sheep. We love and care for one another. And what does that look like? It means that today, as those in the flock of Jesus, who's protected, that no matter where we're walking, in the valley of the shadow of death, or if we're heading up to the mountaintop and climbing the hard hills, we, together, carry someone's burden this week.

And so we, together, and I want to invite you to carry someone's burden along with them, to say, you're not alone. Let me carry this with you. We pray for one another.

Matter of fact, what I want you to do right now, at all campuses, is turn to a person next to you that's wearing a name tag, if they're wearing one, and say to them, say to them, hey, Greg, I'm praying for you, or whatever's on their name tag. If they're not wearing a name tag, just turn to them and say, hey, what's your name? And then say, I'm going to pray for you this week.

Go ahead, do that right now, everywhere. Just turn to someone, tell them you're going to pray for them. And pray for them by name. And pray their name.

And then second, reach towards someone who's drifting. Reach out to that person you haven't seen in a long time. Reach out to that neighbor and say, how are you doing? Reach out to that coworker that seems a little bit despondent.

Because you see, when we do that together, we remind everyone, not only are we under the care of the Good Shepherd, but we, as the Good Shepherd sheep, care for one another. Because we are, and say these words with me, we are people who are known, gathered, and protected.

We have different seasons in our life, and different stories, and different struggles. But you have one shepherd. And the truth of the matter is, you're not just saved from something, you're gathered into someone, and into someone's life. You're gathered into a community. You're gathered to be cared for, and to be loved, and to be walked with. And you're gathered to care, and to love, and to walk along.

That's who we are.

And right now, at all campuses, we're going to be introducing a new song. And I want to invite everyone at all campuses to stay seated. And as you learn this new song, to sing these words of this new song, Even Though I Walk.

And as we hear this song, let us be reminded that even though we walk, we walk together, known, gathered, and protected by the Good Shepherd.

So all campuses, right now, let's sing.