

Good Shepherds

Index Journal Pastor Article

September 11, 2026

Rev. Caroline V. Dennis, Westminster Presbyterian Church

Do you know any good shepherds? Jesus told us and showed us what a good shepherd looks like. He said that the good shepherd knows their sheep by name. He said that the sheep know the sound of their good shepherd's voice. Jesus said that the good shepherd would lay down his life for his sheep. His lesson to his disciples and those who were listening in reminded them of some words they knew by heart, "The Lord is my shepherd... I have everything I need."

Today, on September 11, 2026, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the terrorist attack that took the lives of so many and altered the world for so many more, I'm thinking of the good shepherds who showed up that day and in the days that followed. I'm thinking of the folks who laid down their lives to save as many as they could. I'm thinking of the folks who laid down their lives to participate in search and rescue. I'm thinking of the folks who laid down their lives to feed and hydrate, shelter and comfort those who were participating in the search and rescue. And, I am thinking especially of all those parents and all those teachers, who walked the children in their care through that troubling time.

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me."

Psalm 23:4

On that day and the days that followed, we and our children saw the worst and the best of humanity. Trusted loved ones, parents, teachers, pastors, friends helped them and us make sense of it all.

One teacher/good shepherd at H. Byron Elementary School in Kennett, Missouri helped her class write a book that would be chosen as a "Kid's Are Authors" award winner. The book is titled, "September 12th: We Knew Everything Would Be Alright." The dedication in the book is "to all our families. We like to feel secure and safe." These now 31 and 32 year olds wrote, "On September 11, 2001, many bad things happened." And with their crayons they illustrated planes hitting buildings and firefighters putting out fires. The next page shows a calendar with September 12 and a sunrise between two houses. The words say, "September 12 was a new day. We knew everything would be alright, because the sun came up and..." The book goes on to tell all the ordinary things that happened on September 12, things that made the children feel safe and secure. "The birds started to sing again. We came to school the same way. We knew everything would be alright when we saw our teacher smiling at the door. We said the pledge like always. We sang the national anthem very loudly. Our teacher sat and read us lots of books. We had recess again. We knew everything would be alright because we had homework. 2+2 still added up to 4... On September 12th, our parents still tucked us in our warm, safe beds. Our parents talked to us about the bad things that happened the day before." The book continues, ending with these words, "NOT The End."

Today, September 11, 2026, I am thinking about the good shepherds. I'm thinking about and giving thanks for the shepherds who are walking children (and us) through the ordinary routines of life, through the going out and the coming in. I'm thinking about the ones whose voices our children trust when they are walking through valleys shadowed with death, helping them to know that everything, no matter what, will be alright, for they... and we... are never alone, and this hard thing, whatever it is, is NOT the end.

My prayer today is a prayer of gratitude and hope. Thank you, Good Shepherd, for all the good shepherds who walk among us. May every child, young or old, know one. May each of us be one.

Wherever You Are

Index Journal Pastor Article

July 24, 2026

Rev. Caroline V. Dennis, Westminster Presbyterian Church

I am a church pastor. I am called to follow the Good Shepherd and to be a good shepherd for my flock. The Bible tells me that the Good Shepherd knows his flock and that his flock knows him. They know the sound of his voice. The Good Shepherd told a story once about a lost sheep and the shepherd who left the others to find this wanderer.

This time of year shepherds like me have a difficult time keeping up with their flock. Although it is mid-summer,, some of my flock just returned to school this week. Others are off on vacation and still others are home recovering from medical procedures. Some are at work. Some are visiting family. So, it's difficult to think of a word that will speak to all these sheep scattered in so many places, engaged in such a variety of endeavors. Difficult to think of a word to write to you, dear reader, wherever you are.

So, I borrow today a good word, a benediction from a former chaplain of the United States Senate, the late Reverend Richard C. Halverson.

You go nowhere by accident.
Wherever you go, God is with you.
Wherever you are, God has put you there.
God has a purpose for your being there.
Christ, who is in you, has something
He wants to do through you where you are.
Believe in this and go in God's
Strength, Love, and Power.

Halverson was once asked, "where is your church?" He replied, "well, it's 3:00 on a weekday afternoon in Washington, DC. The church I pastor is all over the city. It's driving buses, serving meals, sitting in board meetings, deliberating in Congress, having discussions at the Pentagon. Periodically, we get together at a building on Fourth Street, but we don't spend much time there."

Suddenly, I am not so distressed by my scattered flock or you who are unknown to me. I may not know where you are, but God does because God is there with you. I am encouraged to know that my flock and you readers are in 1000 places today, being the hands, feet, and face of Christ, among people who know your voice and in it hear echoes of His.