Fourth Sunday of Easter
The Good Shepherd

INTRODUCTION

A shepherd's lonely job was to find food for his sheep and to protect them from wild animals. Today we hear how Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd.

SIGN OF THE CROSS

LIGHT THE CANDLES

Light the candles and then sing the Candle Song together.

SORRY

Close your eyes and think about all the things which have happened over the past week. Have we always been as kind and thoughtful as we should have been? Have we done anything to make God feel sad or disappointed with us? If we are truly sorry in our hearts then God our father will always forgive us.

GLORIA

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

To welcome today's Gospel sing Acclamation 5.

GOSPEL (JOHN 10:2–5, 9–11)

One day Jesus said to the crowds, "A shepherd knows his sheep, and his sheep know him. When he calls their names, they know his voice and they follow him, one by one, through the gate of the sheepfold.

"The shepherd walks ahead of them showing them the way. He guides and protects them from danger and harm. The flock will not follow a stranger, instead they scatter and run away because they do not know his voice."

Then Jesus said, "I am the Good Shepherd, I know my own and my own know me. If anyone follows me, I will lead them safely on their journey to the fullness of everlasting life."

DISCUSSION

How did the sheep recognize their shepherd? They knew the sound of his voice, and he was able to call each one of them by their name.

If you were a shepherd in charge of a flock what would you have to do to take care of it? You would
—make sure that the sheep have plenty to eat;
—make sure that none of them wander or get lost;
—protect them from thieves and wild animals;
—find them shelter from bad weather.

In the land where Jesus lived, there is very little grass, and the shepherd must lead his sheep from place to place to find enough food to eat. (Show any pictures you can find of such terrain.) Often it is steep and hilly, and the sheep must carefully follow their shepherd along the path that he shows them. They rely on him to find food and water for them and to protect them from wild animals.

Why did Jesus call himself the Good Shepherd? Like the shepherd, Jesus will stay with us always. He knows all of us by name and calls us to follow him. He will lead us along the right path to heaven and will protect us from harm along the way. With him before us we can feel safe and secure because we can trust him to take care of all our needs.

ACTIVITY

Make a large picture of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, leading his flock along a path. Each child can write their name on a sheep, stick on several pieces of cotton, and add their sheep to the scene. Or, give each child a copy of this coloring picture and have the children glue cotton balls onto the sheep.

CREED

CLOSING PRAYER

The Lord is my shepherd,
  he gives me everything I need.
He leads me to lie down in green meadows
  and to drink beside cool, deep pools.
He is my strength and protection
  and guides me along the right path.
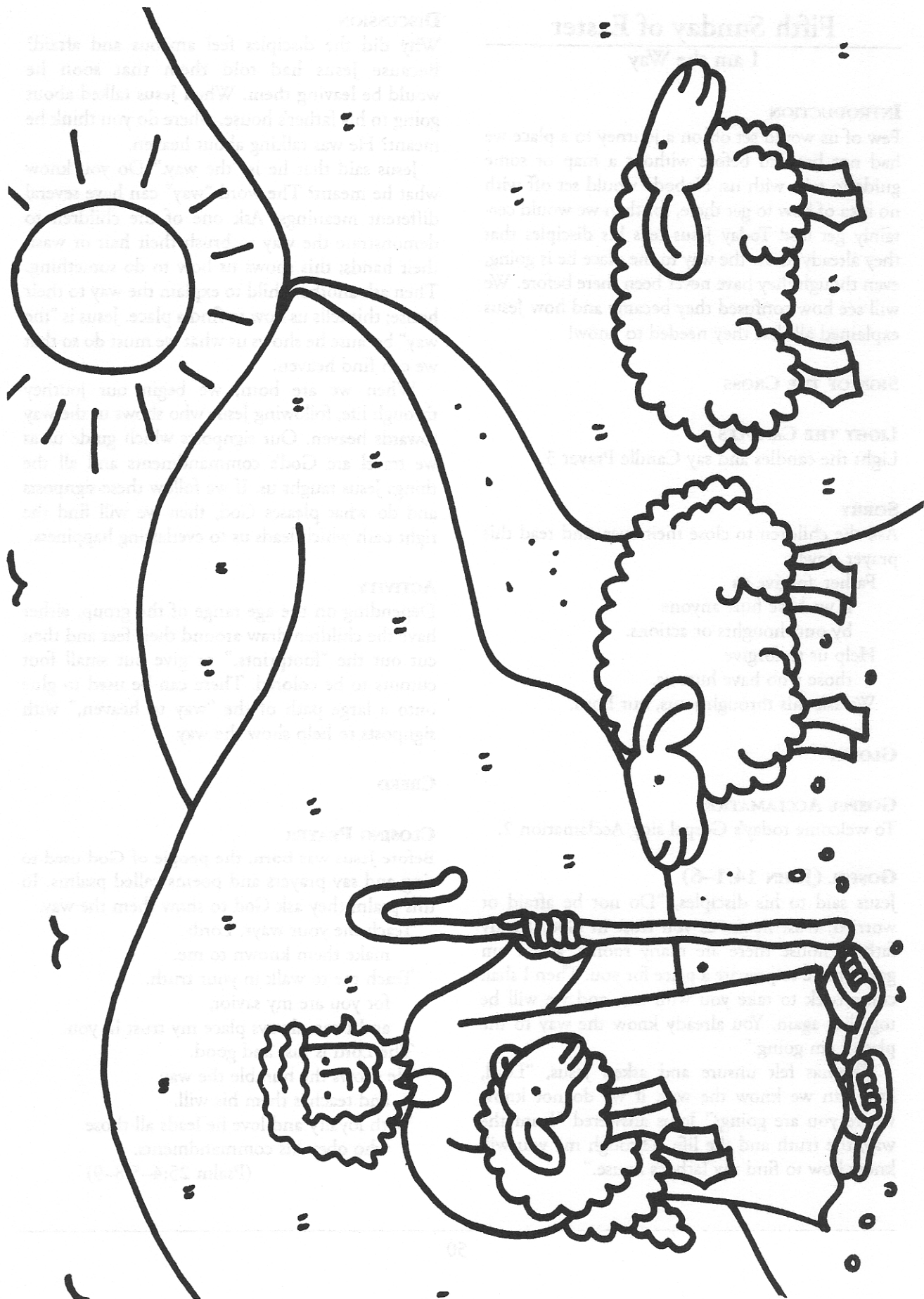Even in times of darkness and trouble
  I will not be afraid,
  for he is always beside me
  and will protect me from harm.
I know that his goodness and love
  will stay with me all the days of my life.
                        (Psalm 23:1–4, 6)

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FOCUSING: The Lord is our protector and guide.

Reflecting

Usually in every group there is an appointed or understood leader, one who takes charge with words like "I think everyone is here. Let's see. Freddie? Maura? James? Ethel? We're all ready, let's go." We need someone in our life to give us direction, to call us together, to help us stay together. We need a leader. It is good when that leader is also our friend.

Jesus is our leader and friend. He calls himself the Good Shepherd. We are his sheep. If we listen, we will hear him call us by name. As his sheep, we will know and follow only his voice. Not only does a shepherd know all his sheep, but being a good shepherd he lays down his life for those in his care. King David was a shepherd who once protected his flock at the risk of his own life. Jesus becomes our Good Shepherd when he lays downs his life for us, his sheep.

Jesus also calls himself the sheepgate. In open country, the shepherd would sleep across the corral opening and have his body become the protecting door. We are welcome to come through this gate, through Jesus, to receive life, life in all its fullness.

Talking

1. Name all the qualities that you think a shepherd should have. Name stories in which Jesus shows the qualities of a good shepherd. Read the story of young David as a shepherd in the Old Testament, 1 Samuel 16:1–13. Talk about other shepherd stories that you know.
2. Discuss the different "voices" of our culture that call on us. How do you listen to and know the voice of Jesus?
3. Share your answers to these questions:
   • What is the meaning of Jesus' role as the Good Shepherd?
   • As a family or a group, when do you experience "life in all its fullness"?
   • As a sheep, how do you show that you follow Jesus?

Doing

1. Write a secret note to a member of your group or family telling him or her why you are happy that all of you belong to the same Good Shepherd. (Choose names secretly so that every person in the group will receive a message.)
2. Make your weekly Scripture symbol—a shepherd's crook or an image of the Good Shepherd. Place it in your home or on your Celebrating the Gospels banner.

Praying

Say this following prayer:

JESUS, our Good Shepherd, give direction to our lives. Help us to see the good, to find the true, and to enjoy the beautiful. Protect us from fear. Please guide us to know your will in all that we do. Amen.

(Find a crook, a walking stick, and take a walk with your group or family.)

BANNER SYMBOL

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Focus

Cards with the names of the children in your group scattered around a central candle, together with pictures of sheep or shepherds.

Introduction

At the time of Jesus, many people were farmers and the sight of a shepherd and his sheep would have been a familiar one. Shepherds traditionally walked at the front of the flock to guide the sheep rather than driving them from behind. The sheep would recognise and know the shepherd's voice and follow him with complete trust and confidence. At night shepherds would gather their flocks into small stockades or folds and lie across the entrance to prevent any sheep from wandering away or coming to harm from wild animals. In today's Gospel, Jesus describes himself as a shepherd who leads his sheep (those who follow him) to rich pastures and the safety of his sheepfold.

Gloria

Gospel Acclamation

Light the Gospel candle and sing Acclamation 3.

Gospel

A reading from the Gospel of St John (10:1-10)
(See page 370.)

Reflection

One of the ways we recognise and respond to one another is by using names. (Allow each person in the group to tell their name.) Without our names we would find it very difficult to communicate or interact with each other! To illustrate this, ask the children to sit in a circle. Hand a child a soft ball, beanbag or something similar. The idea is to throw the object to different people in the circle but without using their names. Instead they will need to find another way of gaining attention – for example, referring to the colour of someone's hair or an article of clothing. This game illustrates the difficulty of communicating with and recognising others without using a name.

What do we do when someone we know calls our name?
If it is a voice or someone we know, we will usually answer their call.

Does anyone have a pet cat or dog? What have you named it? What do they do when you call them by name?
Just like us, our pets learn to recognise people they can trust to love and care for them. If a stranger calls them, they won't follow them because they do not know them.

Why did Jesus compare himself to a gate?
A gate is an entrance way to a particular place. Jesus is 'the way in', through whom we can find the entrance to God's kingdom if we choose to follow him when he calls our names.

Do you know any songs or nursery rhymes about sheep? Can you sing them?
(This last question then leads on to the activity for the day.)

Activity

Draw a large sheep on a piece of card. Write the song on the sheep's body, replacing some of the words with numbers. Have these missing words written on separate pieces of card that are numbered on the back. Help the children to find and glue on the numbered words in the right order to complete the song, which they can then sing together to the tune of 'Baa, baa, black sheep'.

The Good Shepherd knows us by our names,
each one different, none the same.
Follow the Master,
keep us close, we pray,
and let the Good Shepherd
show us God's loving way.

Intercessions

As brothers and sisters in one loving family,
together let us pray to our heavenly Father:

For the Church and its many Christian folds;
that united as one flock we may follow
the Good Shepherd's voice.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

For people who are afraid or feel lost;
that the Good Shepherd will help them
to follow the right way.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

For the leaders of nations and countries;
that they will treat those in their care
with love and respect.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

For those who have died;
that they may enjoy everlasting life and eternal peace
with the Good Shepherd in heaven.
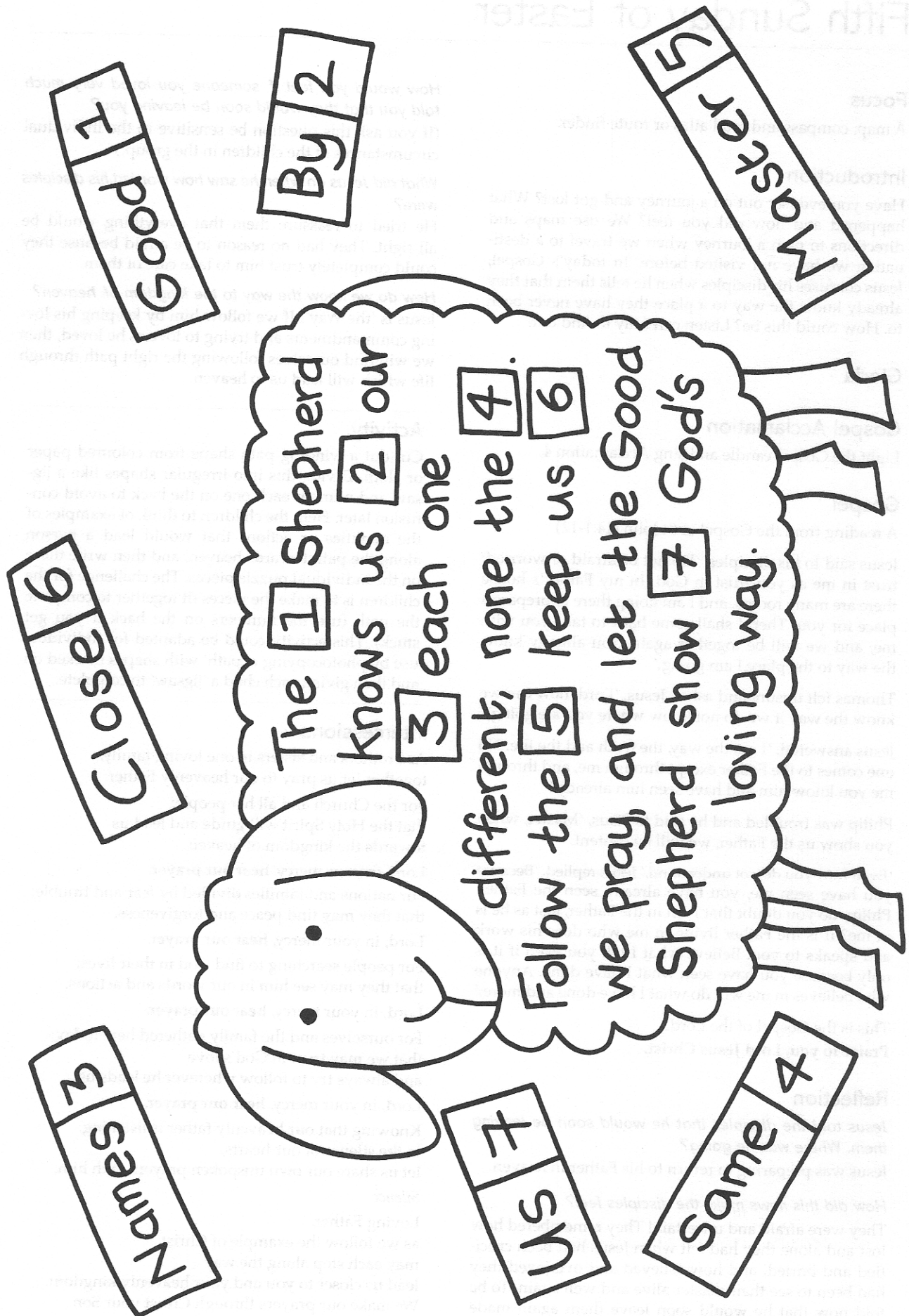
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Knowing that our heavenly father is listening,
in the silence of our hearts,
let us share our own unspoken prayers with him.

Silence

Loving Father,
watch over your flock as you guide and protect us,
and help us to follow your path,
wherever it might lead.
We make our prayers through Christ your Son.
Amen.

Good 1

By 2

Master 5
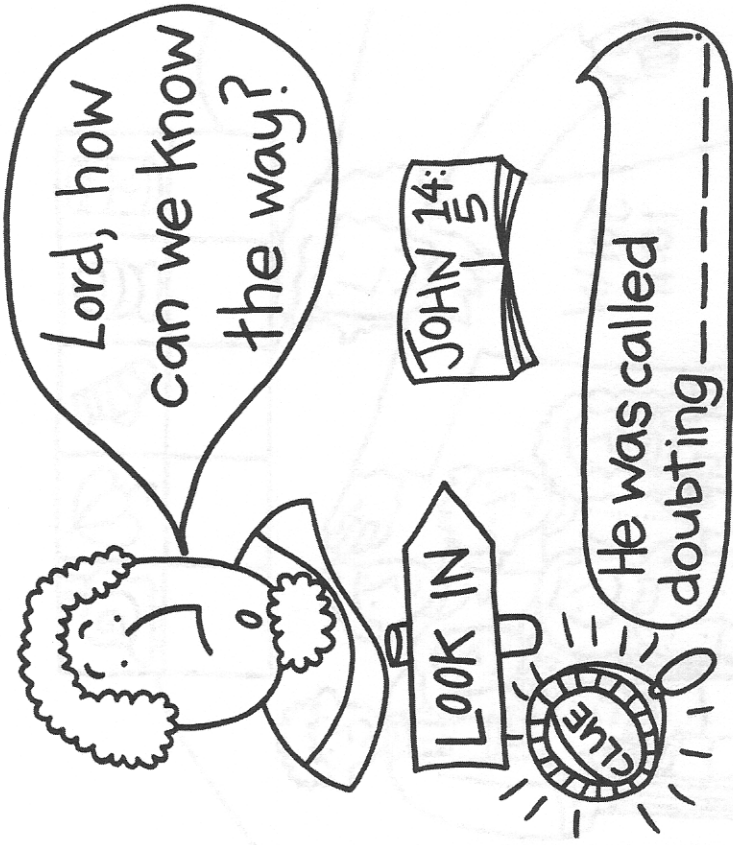
Close 6

Names 3

us 7

Same 4

The 1 Shepherd knows us 2 our 3 each one different, none the 4 . Follow the 5 keep us 6 we pray, and let the Good Shepherd show 7 God's Shepherd loving way.

The Good Shepherd

JOHN 10:1-11

A shepherd takes care of his sheep.

How do the sheep know their own shepherd?

Trace the letters

By his voice

JOHN 10:4

THINK and **LOOK** ahead

Who says this to Jesus next week?

Lord, how can we know the way?

JOHN 14:5

LOOK IN

CLUE

He was called doubting _ _ _ _ _ _

Who is the
Good Shepherd who takes
care of us?

Write the first letter of each picture in the box.
Color the picture

JOHN 10:11
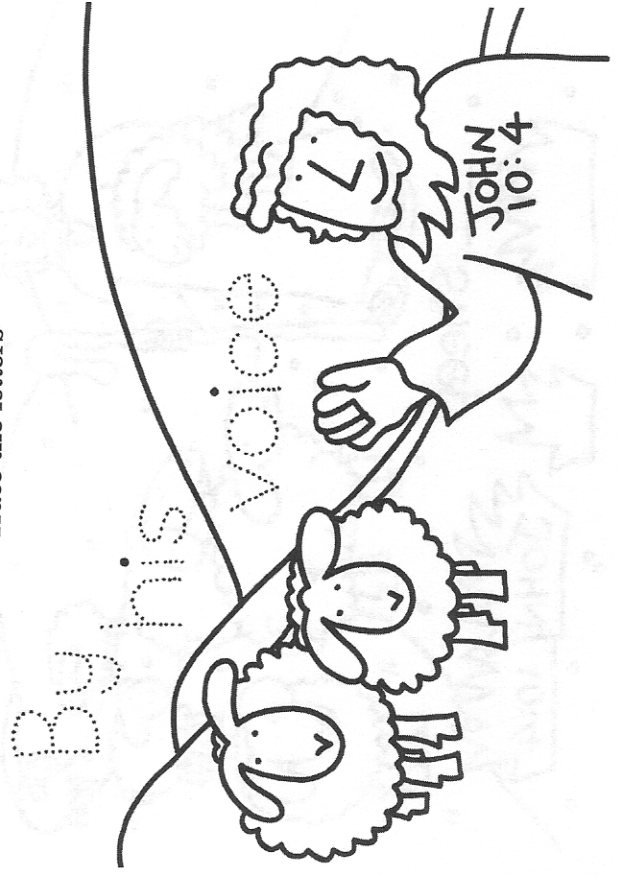
The shepherd knows
each sheep by name, and
they follow him.

How many sheep does this shepherd have to care for?

—— Sheep

JOHN 10:4