

The Third Sunday of Easter  
St. John 10:11-16: "God Help Me!"  
April 17/18, 2021 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

**In Nomine Iesu**

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Lord, almighty and faithful God, let us be found among Your sheep. Draw us after You and confirm our hearts in faith in You until the end. Bless Your sheep, good Shepherd! We pray You earnestly, draw us after You, and never let us go. Amen. (*Book of Family Prayer*, p. 311)

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)*

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*The sermon text for today is taken from the tenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:*

[Jesus said:] "I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. / "I am the Good Shepherd. I know My own and My own know Me, just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to My voice. So there will be one Flock, one Shepherd." (ESV)

*These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)*

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In Christ Jesus, who is with us even while we walk through the valley of the shadow of death (Psa. 23:4), dear fellow redeemed:

Why do we have to be sheep? Jesus refers to us in this way not just in today's text but many times in the New Testament. Why couldn't we be horses, powerful and stately? Or lions, strong and self-sufficient? Or eagles, graceful and independent? Sheep are not like this at all. They are not impressive creatures. They are weak and vulnerable. They cannot easily survive alone or for very long. They need to be protected and cared for. Why does Jesus call us sheep?

Because Jesus tells the truth. He doesn't try to make us feel better about ourselves or get us to rely on ourselves more. He tells the truth about our weaknesses and vulnerabilities, about the many enemies surrounding us, about our need for His continuous protection and care. He calls us sheep because the picture we have of these lowly creatures is the picture we should have of ourselves.

But for all their deficiencies, sheep have positive qualities too. Sheep are loyal to their shepherd. They are not fooled by the voice of another no matter how much he tries to coax them away. Sheep know the voice of their shepherd, and they follow him willingly and faithfully. They know their shepherd will not lead them to harm. They know he will lead them to good food and drink. They trust that he will protect them. If they lose sight of him, they cry out and keep crying out until he comes to their aid.

This is what Jesus promises to do for us believers, His sheep. These promises are expressed so clearly in Psalm 23: *"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul"* (vv. 1-3, KJV). Jesus says that He is the Shepherd who does this for His sheep. *"I am the Good Shepherd. I know My own and My own know Me, just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep."*

Jesus is no hired hand, one who is not invested in the sheep. He loves His sheep so completely that He values their lives more highly than His own. When David volunteered to fight Goliath, he said to King Saul that sometimes a lion or a bear would come and snatch a lamb from his father's flock. A hired hand wouldn't mess with a lion or a bear! But David said, *"I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him"* (1Sa. 17:35). This is how much the sheep mattered to David.

And you matter even more to Jesus. He knows the fierce enemies arrayed against you: the *"ravenous wolves"* of the world who would pull you away from Him (Mat. 7:15), that roaring lion, the devil, who *"prowls around... seeking someone to devour"* (1Pe. 5:8), and the jaws of death like a grizzly bear which relentlessly hunts its prey. This world is not a safe place for sheep!

But you have a strong, fearless Shepherd. Day and night, He watches over His flock. In pleasant pastures or dark valleys, He gives you His full attention. And even when it seemed that the sheep would be utterly destroyed, when enemies closed in on every side, He did not back down. He let sin, death, and devil take hold of Him. He let them sink their teeth into Him. It was the only way to save the flock, the only way to save you. *"The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep."*

Jesus laid down His life for you on the cross. He became a Lamb like you, so He could give Himself in your place. By His death and His resurrection, He overcame the wolfish world (Joh. 16:33). He crushed the devil's scaly head (Gen. 3:15, 1Jo. 3:8). He swallowed up death itself and destroyed its power forever (Isa. 25:8).

This is the Shepherd who constantly watches over you. His enemies still want to sink their teeth into you, but they aren't about to go near your Good Shepherd. As long as you are in His care, listening to His voice and following His lead, you are safe from their attacks. Jesus will never leave you alone to fend for yourself. He will not forget to guard and protect you. He speaks comforting and assuring words to you and refreshes you through His holy Word and Sacraments. He promises that through these means, He will be *"with you always, to the end of the age"* (Mat. 28:20).

This was Martin Luther's comfort 500 years ago today (April 18, 1521) when he stood before the most powerful government official in Europe, Emperor Charles V. He had been summoned to an assembly of princes and other representatives meeting in the German city of Worms. Luther's teachings were not the main reason for this four-month-long meeting, but because of the effect of the Reformation movement across the land, the teachings of Luther had to be considered in some way.

Luther traveled to Worms with the understanding that he would be able to discuss the things he had written. But when his "time in court" came, he was asked just two questions: "Are these

your books?" And, "do you reject the heresies they contain?" The emperor and his advisers weren't interested in a discussion and certainly not a debate with Luther. They wanted to silence him and stamp out the Reformation before it spread any further.

Luther was like a lamb surrounded by a pack of hungry wolves. He knew what he was facing. He could cave to the emperor's demands, reject his own writings, and save his skin. Or he could take a stand, confess the truth, and be condemned as a heretic—maybe even be burned at the stake.

Jesus had predicted moments like this. He said to His disciples then just as He says to us now: *"For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them. And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations. And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit"* (Mar. 13:9-11).

And so the Lord guided Luther as he stood before the emperor. Luther would not compromise the clear Word of God for the sake of peace. He would not bow to the powers of the world, though all were arrayed against him. He said: "Unless I am convinced by the testimonies of the Holy Scriptures or evident reason (for I believe neither in the Pope nor councils alone, since it has been established that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures adduced by me, and my conscience has been taken captive by the Word of God, and I am neither able nor willing to recant, since it is neither safe nor right to act against conscience. I cannot do otherwise. Here I stand. God help me! Amen."

"God help me!" he said. Luther did not stand up for the truth by his own strength. He knew he was just a little lamb. In fact, the last words he wrote before his death were, "We are all beggars; this is true." But his death did not come in 1521 when Luther stood before the emperor. He died of natural causes about twenty-five years later. The Lord spared the life of this lamb, so that he could continue to point people to salvation by grace through faith in Jesus.

We are some of those who have benefited from Luther's stand. The pure Gospel message has been passed down to us, and we pray that it is passed on to many more after us. We need to continuously hear the reassuring voice of Jesus through His Word. We need to hear that despite our weaknesses and sins, He still loves us and forgives us. He has not run out of patience toward us but still watches over and fights for His precious sheep.

It is easy to doubt that our Good Shepherd will care for us like He says He will. It seems that the enemies against us are too many and too strong. We are afraid of what they may do to us. Their threats cause us to become silent and hide ourselves. But even when we have stopped calling out to Jesus, He does not stop calling out to us.

*"My sheep hear my voice,"* He says, *"and I know them, and they follow me"* (Joh. 10:27). He calls us back to Him through His gracious Word. He calls us to find refuge and strength and courage in Him. He knows our troubles and fears. He knows our struggles. He knows our sins. He knows us better than we could ever know ourselves. *"I know My own,"* He says, *"just as the Father knows*

*Me and I know the Father.” He knows you as deeply as the Father and the Son know each other in the Godhead.*

When you cry out to Him in anguish, even if you don’t know how to ask for what you need, He knows. He hears your cry. And like the Good Shepherd who rescues his sheep, Jesus saves you. He prepares a table before you in the presence of your enemies; He anoints your head with oil; your cup overflows (Psa. 23:5). *“I give them eternal life,”* said Jesus, *“and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand”* (Joh. 10:27-28).

**“God Help Me!”** prayed Luther. And God did. God wants the truth of His Gospel to be proclaimed to the whole world. He sends the help that we sinners need most of all, which is deliverance from all evil and a safe transport to His eternal kingdom.

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.*

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