

Easter 3 – Vicar Lehne Sermon

John 10:11-16: “The Good Shepherd Knows You”

4/13/24; 4/14/24 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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Good and faithful Shepherd, Jesus Christ, who, of Your infinite love, laid down Your life for the sheep, we give You praise and glory for this Your unspeakable grace and mercy; and we humbly ask You, feed us upon the pleasant pastures of Your Word, give us to drink of the waters of salvation, and guide us by Your Holy Spirit, that, as You know us and continually minister to our need, even so we may know You, gladly hear Your voice, and follow You, and by You be delivered from all our foes, until the whole flock shall be gathered in heaven about You, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen (The Lutheran Liturgy, companion altar book for The Lutheran Hymnal, p. 120).

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

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:

¹⁴[Jesus said:] I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.

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

In Christ Jesus, who laid down his life for us that he might take it up again, dear fellow redeemed:

The sheep were all jumbled together. Several shepherds had brought their sheep to the same pen for the night. The pen had only one gate that was guarded by a watchman, and it had walls that were tall enough to keep the sheep from wandering away during the night and to keep thieves and predators, such as wolves, out. But if all of the sheep were in the same pen, how would the shepherds know whose sheep were whose when they came back for them in the morning? It actually wasn't a problem at all. Why? Because the sheep knew the voice of their shepherd. When they heard their shepherd's voice, they followed him, while the other sheep, who did not recognize his voice, stayed behind. The shepherds led their sheep by their word.

In our reading for today, we are called “sheep,” and if we are sheep, then that means that we must have a shepherd whose voice we follow. Who is that shepherd? He is none other than Jesus, the Good Shepherd. When we call Jesus “the Good Shepherd,” we don't mean that he is simply good at being a shepherd. We mean that he is the best shepherd that we could possibly have, and Jesus shows this in what he was willing to do for us.

You were once lost sheep, wandering every which way and being hunted by wolves. These wolves are your spiritual enemies: the devil, the world, and your sinful nature. Led by the devil, your spiritual enemies had completely surrounded you. You were doomed to be snatched by them and dragged away into the fires of hell. But even though you were already in the deadly

clutches of your enemies, Jesus did not want to leave you to that fate. So, he left the green pastures of heaven and entered the wilderness of Earth to save you. When Jesus appeared, the wolves attacked him and killed him. In this moment, your spiritual enemies thought they had won, but it was by Jesus' death, by the shedding of his blood, that the price that was necessary to save you was paid. By the shedding of Jesus' blood, you were made his own. Jesus saved you from the clutches of your enemies by laying down his life for you. This is what sets Jesus apart from all other shepherds. "The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (verse 11). Other shepherds are willing to protect their sheep, but they wouldn't go so far as laying down their lives for their sheep. It is through this act, through willingly laying down his own life for you, that Jesus shows just how much he loves you.

But Jesus didn't leave you without a shepherd. As he says in the verses following our reading for today, "I lay down my life that I may take it up again" (John 10:17). Death had no power over Jesus. On the third day, he rose again from the dead, declaring his victory over your spiritual enemies. Because Jesus is risen, you remain safe from the attacks of your spiritual enemies and are led to green pastures and still waters that nourish the faith that you have been given. As the psalmist says, "He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul" (Psalm 23:2-3). These green pastures and still waters that your Good Shepherd nourishes you with are the means of grace, the Word and Sacraments.

Just like real sheep, who are led by the word of their shepherds, you are led by the Word of your Good Shepherd. You know Jesus' voice because he speaks to you through his Word, and the words that he speaks to you are very comforting. When there are sins that are troubling you, Jesus says to you, "I forgive you all your sins." When you feel like you are in danger from the wolves that surround you, Jesus says to you, "They will never snatch you out of my hand." When you feel lost, Jesus says to you, "Follow me." And when you feel like you are all alone, with no one to turn to, Jesus says to you, "I will be with you always, even to the end of the age." Your Good Shepherd not only leads you with these comforting words. He also nourishes you and strengthens you with them, just like he does with the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion.

In the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, you are marked for eternal life, which Jesus promises to give to his sheep in the verses following our reading for today (verse 28). You are marked for eternal life when the waters of baptism wash your sins away. These waters continue to wash you to this day. For every day, your new self rises up out of the waters of your baptism and your old self is drowned in them. Through baptism, you are comforted and strengthened, knowing that you have been washed clean. For since you have been washed clean, you have been marked as Jesus' own, meaning that the eternal life that he promises to give his sheep is yours.

While you wait for the day when you will receive your promised eternal life, you receive a foretaste of it in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. During this holy supper, you feast on the true body and blood of your Good Shepherd who laid down his life for you to win you that eternal life. Jesus willingly went to the cross and shed his blood for you, and through the shedding of his blood, you receive the forgiveness of sins. When you come to his table, along with your fellow sheep, the forgiveness of sins that he won for you on the cross is brought to you when you eat and drink Jesus' true body and blood in the bread and the wine. Then, you leave his table strengthened and nourished in the confidence that you have been forgiven.

These means of grace truly are the best green pastures and still waters that your Good Shepherd can provide you with in this life.

You are blessed to have a Good Shepherd who continues to provide for your spiritual needs and protect you from your spiritual enemies. But that doesn't mean that you can let your guard down. Your spiritual enemies are cunning, and there are lots of tricks that they have up their sleeves that they use against you to try and lure you away from your Good Shepherd. One of their most cunning tricks is to use false teachers to leave you defenseless to their attacks. Even though Jesus is your Good Shepherd, he has left you with shepherds who he has tasked with watching over his sheep. These shepherds are your pastors. But not all pastors are true shepherds who serve the Good Shepherd. Some of them look good and sound good, but in reality, all they care about is themselves. They do not feel responsible for you. All they want is to make a living off of you. So, when the wolves attack, they show their true colors and leave the flock to fend for themselves. Jesus compares these false teachers to the hired hands who watch the sheep. He says, "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" (verses 12-13). What a blessing it is to have a pastor who truly cares about you and is always willing to be there for you.

But that is only one of the tricks that you have to look out for. Another one of your spiritual enemies' most cunning tricks is making their voices sound like the voice of your Good Shepherd. You look to God's Word to hear the words of Jesus, but when you read them, the devil, the father of lies, says to you, "When Jesus said this, what he really meant was that." As the world continues to live in sin and encourages you to join in with them, you point to what Jesus has said to you in his Word. But in response, the world says to you, "Those things only applied to the people of the Bible. We don't have to follow those things anymore." When your sinful nature tempts you to sin, you remember the words that Jesus spoke to you. But your sinful nature responds by saying, "You still have faith in Jesus, don't you? It doesn't matter what you do, because faith is all you need." These, along with all other ways that your spiritual enemies attempt to lead you astray, can sound very convincing and can trick you into thinking that their voices are the voice of your Good Shepherd. But unfortunately, there are even times when you and I know that we are not hearing Jesus' voice, yet we decide to listen to the false voices and follow them anyway. We must be careful, because these wolves are only trying to get us into their jaws so that they can snatch us and drag us away from our Good Shepherd, away from the green pastures and still waters of the means of grace, and into the fires of hell.

Even though we are sheep that love to wander and constantly fall for the tricks that our spiritual enemies use against us, we don't need to fear losing our place in green pastures of heaven, because we belong to Jesus. As Jesus says in the verses following our reading for today, "No one will snatch [my sheep] out of my hand" (John 10:28). When we do wander into the clutches of our spiritual enemies, Jesus will be there to rescue us from them. No matter how far we've wandered away from him, Jesus is willing to go to the ends of the earth to lead us back to him. Jesus knows who his sheep are, and he will never abandon them, especially not when they need him most.

The sheep know the voice of their shepherd, but this knowing isn't one-sided. Your Good Shepherd also knows you. But this knowing is much more than simply recognizing each other. Even the devil, the leader of the wolves, recognizes who Jesus is. This knowing is a knowledge that unites you with your Savior in love. You love Jesus, your Good Shepherd, and desire to follow him. But this love does not have its origin in you. It has its origin in Jesus and what he did for you. As the apostle John says, "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Jesus loved you so much that he was willing to lay down his own life so that you may experience eternal life in the green pastures of heaven. And Jesus still shows his love for you in that, as your risen Lord, he leads you safely through the dangers of this world until you reach those green pastures of heaven. As the psalmist says, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me" (Psalm 23:4). Jesus, your Good Shepherd is better than any other shepherd because no one has love that matches his. So, you can be confident that your Good Shepherd knows you and will lead you to the green pastures of heaven. As Jesus says, "I give [my sheep] eternal life, and they will never perish" (John 10:28).

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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