

Sermon for Sun. May 8, 2022

Easter 4c John 10:11-22 “A Shepherd in Sheep’s Clothing.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text for this morning is from St. John chapter 10, **“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”**

Jesus Christ is risen from the dead! The tender mercies of God are made clear to us in His Son’s resurrection. Jesus the Good Shepherd is bound up in Jesus the Risen One.

God Himself goes out and searches for the lost, the sheep of His pasture that have strayed away from him.

In one place our Lord described us as **“harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd.”** Do you ever feel that way? Are you harassed on every side? Are you rudderless, lost, and without direction?

Does it almost seem to you like no one is in charge, and that things continue to happen however they will, sometimes good, sometimes bad?

God knows your own trials of body and soul, and He longs to gather you into Himself.

One thing is for certain, God has great plans for you. Peter put it this way in our Epistle: **“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.”**

God longs to hold you and keep you in the palm of His hand. God longs to keep you safe, to feed you.

He doesn’t want you to continue to cling to sin like an old shoe that fits great but is bad for your feet. God is telling you this morning, “These sins, you don’t need them! They are not you anymore!”

Yet every day it seems as those you and I continue down the same lost paths, committing the same sins, wandering away like sheep that don’t know any better.

Why do we do this? We do this because we don’t know any better.

Yet our Heavenly Father longs to draw you to the still waters of His Word, and to give you good pasture, to feed you with the food of eternal life. God wants to give you all things in His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

In our Gospel for today, Jesus talked about the relationship between Himself and His people, the sheep.

Now I don't know about you, but I'm a city slicker. We city folks don't have any sense of what it is like to try and round up 100 sheep, keep them together and safe, feed and water them, guard them against predators, and the like. We don't know by experience how sheep really are.

Sheep sometimes get a bad rap as being a dumb animal. Now that isn't really fair.

It would probably better to say that sheep are herd animals, or that they are trusting animals. They will follow together, and are rarely in groups of less than four or five.

What this means in real terms is that if a sheep goes astray, it's likely led astray. And if it does go astray by itself, it's almost totally helpless.

So, of all the animals to use as an analogy for us, why would God use this one? And how does this help to teach us about the Resurrected Jesus and His life for us as the Good Shepherd?

It means that you and I by nature are followers. We may follow other people, we may follow our hearts or our desires, but we are followers.

Even when we rebel, we rebel in imitation of the truth. Because you and I have followed down the wrong paths for so long, God must shepherd us back.

God must draw us to Him, keep us in Him, guard us, feed, us and lead us to the still waters. He says it this way in Ezekiel, **“Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out.”**

This is all well and good, but simply saying that the Lord is my Shepherd can be an empty phrase. Jesus the Good Shepherd can quickly become no more than words, It has no flesh and blood because we don't know what it means.

So this is where we talk about the Church. Christ is risen! He rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, but He is not absent. He is hidden, and He hides Himself here, in His Church.

The church is Christ's tool, His voice, His hands. There is a strong relationship between the Good Shepherd and the under-shepherds of His Church.

When Christ returned to heaven, He appointed apostles to be His messengers, His ambassadors.

Those apostles were to preach in His name, forgive sins on His behalf, baptize and deliver His body and blood to the sheep, God's people.

When Paul spoke to the pastors of the Church at Ephesus, he said it like this, **“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”**

God has put a pastor into your life to serve you. In this case it is me, but God of course could and indeed has used many others for this same purpose.

The person of the pastor is not important. The office of the pastor for us is the link between God's Word and God's people.

In the Lutheran Confessions we say it this way: ***Thank God, a seven-year-old child knows what the Church is, namely, the holy believers and lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd***

God has raised Jesus Christ from the dead. He is your Good Shepherd, who guides you to the paths of eternal life because of His tender mercy.

He preaches to you, waters you, feeds you, protects you from evil within and without. You dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Listen to His Voice, for in His Word you have eternal life.

Follow the voice of the Shepherd, the voice you heard at your Baptism, the voice you hear as you receive His Body and Blood in the Holy

Sacrament, the voice you will hear at the Last Day when He will raise you and all believers to eternal life.

Listen to that voice, for in it you have eternal life. Believe it for Jesus' sake. Amen.