

John 10:11-18
“The Shepherd and the Sheep”
Fourth Sunday of Easter

April 22, 2018
First Lutheran Church, Glencoe, Minn.
Pastor Peter Adelsen

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen!

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! {He is Risen, indeed! Alleluia!}

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Hey, Sheep!]

Jesus said: *“I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me”* (John 10:14).

Some time ago, a seminary professor visited two of his students who lived on a farm.

While there, the students’ father asked the professor if he would like to help call the sheep. The professor enthusiastically agreed.

“Go ahead,” the father asked. “Call them in.”

“What do you say?” the professor asked.

“I just say, ‘Hey, sheep! Come on in!’”

This sounds pretty easy, the professor thought. So, he began calling for the sheep, “Hey, sheep! Come on in!”

Not one sheep moved. He tried again and again. “Hey, sheep! Come on in!” No change. Not one sheep even twitched an ear.

Then the father smiled and said to the professor, “Have you ever read, ‘My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me’?” Then raising his voice slightly, the father said, “Hey, sheep! Come on in!” Then all 25 sheep turned and walked toward them.

You see, the shepherd establishes a relationship with his sheep. The shepherd knows his sheep and his sheep know him.

[The Good Shepherd]

In today's gospel reading, our Lord Jesus Christ says, ***"I am the good shepherd."*** Now, what does it mean to be the good shepherd? Well, in today's world, the word "good" has changed. Today, most people understand "good" to be suitable or pleasant and implies that it could be better. What Jesus is saying here is the historic or traditional understanding of "good", which means that He is the best or greatest shepherd. That is what He is saying.

And take notice to what Jesus is saying. He isn't saying that He is a good shepherd. He is saying that He is the good shepherd.

And as the Good Shepherd, He knows His sheep.

In our First Reading, Luke — with the help of the Holy Spirit — writes, ***"And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved"*** (Acts 4:12).

Christ is the Good Shepherd. He alone is the only way to salvation by grace through faith in Him. Outside of the Good Shepherd, there is no hope for salvation.

By being the Good Shepherd, Jesus is saying that He is the only one ***"who lays down His life for the sheep"*** (John 10:11b). No other shepherd does that. No other shepherd is willing to die for His flock. This is what makes Him good.

[The Hired Hand]

Now, as sheep, we are prone to wander. We may even find ourselves following another shepherd, because we are attracted to teachers who preach what we want to hear.

Jesus said: ***"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"*** (John 10:12-13).

Jesus knows the sinful desires of men. Here Jesus is reminding everyone that the hired hand is not a shepherd.

Now, the hired hand is not totally wicked — unlike the wolf, who is wicked — but he is simply more committed to his own well-being than to the well-being of the sheep. He wants to be liked and does things that get the approval of the sheep.

Instead of preaching Law and Gospel, the hired hand may preach the “prosperity gospel” – which is all about your life now and refuses to mention that death is the result of sin and that Jesus has won salvation, life everlasting and forgiveness of sin to all who believe in Him. “Prosperity preachers” forget to realize that when we die, we can’t take our worldly possessions to heaven.

Or, the hired hand may preach gospel reductionism – or gospel only sermons – which refuses to mention the Law of God and why the Gospel truly matters.

Both of these “gospels” have no good news at all. They are all about the present and refuse to look at the future. For without the distinction of Law and Gospel, the sheep don’t know what to think and how to live as forgiven Christians.

As Martin Luther wrote¹, “(Hired hands) are never true shepherds who, in preaching, have their own popularity, profit and advantage in view. They are surely hirelings; for they seek their own advantage, even when they dispense the true doctrine and Word of God.”

You see, since the hired hand cares nothing for the sheep, they are “fair weather fans” of Christ. The hired hand retracts and denies the Word of God. Then when the wolf comes — who is Satan — he flees and lets the wolf destroy the sheep.

So, in order to preserve the sheep, there must be pure teaching and God-pleasing unity in the Church. This is to be done by the pastor – Christ’s under-shepherd – who presents pure, beneficial teaching correctly, and at the same time striking down false teachings, and he is there for Christ’s sheep, whether at church, a shut-in call, a hospital visit, or a prison visit. And, of course, the sheep should tell the under-shepherd when the pastor is needed, since we aren’t all-knowing like the Good Shepherd. For Christ’s under-shepherds are to pasture and feed the sheep and ward off the wolves.²

¹ Luther: “A Sermon on the Good Shepherd”, Church Postil, 1523.

² Book of Concord: The Formula of Concord (Solid Declaration), 529-530.

For this is why under-shepherds preach Law and Gospel, which afflicts the comfortable and comforts the afflicted. We preach Law and Gospel to keep Christ's sheep safe from the wolf — the devil — who would enjoy to devour each of us.

You see, the devil seeks divisions. He also seeks compromise. But for Christ, He wants none of that. For Jesus says: ***“There will be one flock, one shepherd”*** (John 10:16b).

As one flock that follows one Shepherd, we are to be loyal to our Lord Jesus Christ. We look at ourselves and guide other Christians into following right teaching and tell others in love who are faltering on how to get back to the flock of Christ.

[The Sheep]

As Christians, we are Christ's sheep. He purchased us at our baptism when we were born again with the water and His Word. We are also united to Christ through His body and blood for which He gives us in His Supper, which forgives our sins and strengthens our faith. In being one flock, this is why we examine ourselves to be in agreement with Christ's body and blood and to the teachings of His Church.

Christ also tells us that He knows His flock and His flock knows Him: ***“I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me”*** (John 10:14).

As His sheep, we listen when the Good Shepherd speaks, much like that father on the farm who calls his sheep and they listen and follow their shepherd.

We listen to Christ when He speaks, because His Words spring forgiveness of sins, salvation and life everlasting. You see, at His crucifixion on Good Friday, Jesus laid down His life for the sheep — His fallen people, both Jew and Gentile. Through His death, He purchased us at a price. But that wasn't the end. And how were we purchased?

Jesus answers that: ***“For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again”*** (John 10:17).

We know we were purchased and redeemed by Jesus, because He rose from the dead! Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

“By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers” (1 John 3:16).

Our Lord Jesus Christ gave His life as an atoning sacrifice for His sheep — all of us. Through His death and resurrection, He gives us life. He gives us hope. He gives us joy.

As John writes in his epistle, as followers of Christ, we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters in the faith to preserve the truth of Christ.

So, like Jesus, we lay down our lives that our brothers and sisters might be saved.

This is exactly what Stephen, Peter, Paul and countless others have done. They died for the truth of Christ. They did not bend or change Christ’s teachings. For it is never loving to bend to the world’s desires in hopes of being liked by the world and leave the flock to the wolves.

As Christ died and rose for His flock to grant us forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. We, too, are to be aware at all times when God’s Word is threatened by the wolf. That is why we are to be in God’s Word and repent of our sins by asking God the Father for forgiveness.

Through Christ alone, our hearts and minds are comforted, because He is the one and only Good Shepherd, and not only that, He is also the very Lamb of God who has taken away the sin of the world for those who believe in Him.

By God’s grace, we have been given forgiveness, life and salvation through the Good Shepherd – who has laid down His life for you, the sheep. Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠