

"The Good Shepherd"

Text: John 10:11-18

May the undeserved love of God be multiplied to you, and may you know and enjoy the peace which comes only to those who know Jesus Christ as their Good Shepherd. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

Would you recognize the devil's voice if you heard it? I doubt it. The devil typically speaks in familiar, soothing, reasonable tones – logical in the extreme. Peter failed to recognize the devil's voice, and therefore unwittingly served as his mouthpiece in urging Jesus to stay away from Jerusalem and to thus avoid the cross and the tomb. Jesus, on the other hand, recognized the voice of Satan even when it came from Peter's mouth. You recall his reaction: **"Get behind Me, Satan!"** (Matthew 16:23)

Satan can indeed be most persuasive. His ideas often strike a chord deep within our sinful flesh – which makes his work appallingly easy at times. It feels more natural, for example, to agree with public opinion than it does to swim continually against the tide. It feels more sensible and right to follow our own logic and intuition than it does, as Luther put it, "to pluck out the eyes of our reason" and to be guided only by the Word of God. It feels more natural to do what *feels* right than to do what God says is right.

That's part of the reason why once each year we celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday – because we recognize and acknowledge that we are foolish sheep in desperate need of a Shepherd. So it is that this morning we will not only remind ourselves of our need for a Shepherd, but to learn how and why Jesus alone can be that Good Shepherd. That part of our Good Shepherd's Word that we study this morning is found in the Gospel of John, the Third Chapter:

ESV **John 10:11-18** *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.* ¹² *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.* ¹³ *He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.* ¹⁴ *I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,* ¹⁵ *just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.* ¹⁶ *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. ¹⁷ *For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again.* ¹⁸ *No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."*

These are the very words of God, given to mankind in general, and this morning to you in particular. Trust God's promise that those who hear – really *hear* - his words and treasure them will receive his blessing. Asking him to bless each of us through our study this morning, we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

One of the keys to contentment is to acknowledge the good things that we *do* have, rather than to gaze longingly at what we don't. To that end, just what *is* ours? What do you and I have, right this very moment, that we tend to take for granted or despise? The answer probably ought to be obvious, but we will take the time this morning to leave no doubt.

The same Apostle that wrote our text for this morning, also wrote in his First Epistle: **"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!"** The fact that we hear such words without pausing to appreciate their gravity and depth of meaning ought to shame us. To have a general knowledge of God is one thing. To be *known by him* to the point of being adopted as his child is something else altogether – something truly grand and inspiring. The problem, of course, is that the world around us ridicules this truth. Tell someone that you are on intimate terms with a famous and powerful world leader and society's reaction is instant awe and respect. Tell those same people that you are on such intimate terms with God that he has adopted you as a son or daughter, and they'll likely look at you like your cord doesn't quite reach the outlet.

The world likes showy stuff. While Jesus was busy paying their sin debt on the cross (and thereby opening the door *to eternal life*) they would have preferred that he wow them by floating down from the cross and maybe dazzling them with a miracle or two. Think about that for a minute. The godless have never been interested in what Jesus came to earth to do for them. They will never therefore place any value on anyone that bears his name.

But that's what we would expect from unbelievers. What is our excuse, we who bear the name of our Savior Jesus? How is it that we have come to be so unappreciative of so much that the Lord does for us day by day? That's exactly why we are taking the time this morning – on Good Shepherd Sunday – to look at some of those unseen blessings we tend to take for granted. How fitting to do so on this day, for a good shepherd is the perfect example of the unsung hero who faithfully and anonymously carries out his simple duties without praise or fanfare. How fitting then to take some time to examine just what our Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, does for us day by day.

It is probably safe to say that many of you have, in the past, walked away from potentially serious accidents virtually untouched. This is a recognizable blessing – a blessing that is seen. What about the unseen? How many times has God prevented your injury or death in the past week? The past year? The past decade? You will never know, which is exactly the point. Nearly every time God *prevents* accidents from happening to you, God's mercy and protection go undetected – and usually unappreciated.

The sum total of all the unseen blessings of our Lord is actually beyond our ability to fully comprehend. That is not to say we are right in our lack of appreciation, nor that we ought not struggle to recognize our Lord's hand in our lives. To this end it might help to bring to mind some of the petitions in the Lord's Prayer. How many times has God heard and answered our petitions in the Lord's Prayer, though we had absolutely no idea how he was working in our lives?

In the Fourth Petition we pray, "***Give us this day our daily bread.***" When was the last time anyone here went hungry? Does anyone here *fear* hunger? Of course not. God has *always* blessed us with so much food that we have to pay our farmers *not* to farm. In America we spend more on weight loss than most countries spend on food. Spring reminds us of another miracle we take for granted. We place a seed into the ground and simply trust that it will germinate and grow. God has never let us down, but his perfect consistency is no reason to stop thanking and appreciating him.

In the Sixth and Seventh Petitions we pray, "***And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.***" We would probably be absolutely terrified if God notified us each time he has honored these petitions in our lives, but we would undoubtedly also be more appreciative. How many times has he steered us away from a temptation that would have caused great damage to our marriage, our

family, or our personal health and wellbeing? How many times has he delivered us from evil of which we were completely unaware – evil of an unseen, spiritual nature against which we remain powerless apart from our Savior? How many times has Satan asked God to torment us, as he asked in connection with Job, only to have our God withhold his consent? How many times has God kept the plane aloft in which you were traveling (and the engines intact), cleansed your body of a disease that never materialized, prevented a thief (or worse) from targeting you or your home? Occasionally he gives us a brief glimpse of his loving protection, but for the most part we live in blissful ignorance of his countless unseen blessings.

The greatest blessing (by far and of course) is the unconditional forgiveness of our sins in Jesus Christ. Who here does not take for granted the universal justification of the world – God's declaration that the sins of the world have been paid for by the life and death of his Son, Jesus Christ? Do we ever contemplate the sublime fact that God knew us by name before the creation of the world, and chose us to be his own from eternity? When was the last time we even considered the fact that Jesus, our Good Shepherd, continues to act as our Mediator – speaking to God the Father in our behalf? (1 John 2:1) Or that Jesus is with us always, just as he promised? (Matthew 28:20) Or that the Holy Spirit continually intercedes for us? (Romans 8:26)

The world knows nothing of such things. Nor do they care. A great shame, to be sure, but a far greater shame is if we Christians fail to give our God the thanks and praise he deserves. Our text for this morning tells us that our Savior God never fails us. He is, on the contrary, our *Good Shepherd* – in every possible way.

It's no wonder Jesus referred to us so often as sheep. Sheep, again, are amazingly stupid creatures. If there is one thing that is universally true about sheep, it is that they desperately need a shepherd. Always. Without a shepherd they are easy pickings for predators and they will universally fall victim to their own foolishness. Again, that's us. More specifically, that's *me*. That's *you*. This is part of what Jesus was telling us in our text for this morning. We too desperately need not just a shepherd; we need the *Good Shepherd* – because the "Wolf" is not only *out there*, the "wolf" is also *in here*, inside of each of us. We tend to forget our continual need for our Good Shepherd, but he doesn't. That's why he's the *Good Shepherd*.

So how do we know when we are safely under the protection of the Good Shepherd? How do we know that we haven't been following a

false voice (or **"hired hand"** as Jesus described false shepherds in our text)? Jesus doesn't make us guess. In the verses preceding our text he told us to listen carefully for his voice. The sheep follow Jesus *because they know his voice*. This is exactly why God's Word is so important to us. Your Bible is the voice of your Good Shepherd.

Our course of action actually then becomes rather simple and straightforward: *Follow only the Good Shepherd*. Jesus is unique in every way, but especially in his role as the Good Shepherd. Think for a moment of how it would have done no good for us to have Jesus simply die defending us. A shepherd who dies defending his flock is a failure to his flock. Other wolves will come. Jesus was different. In our text he tells us that he not only **"laid down his life for the sheep,"** he also **"took it up again."** Jesus Christ died on Calvary not because evil men overpowered him, but because he resolved to give up *his* life that *we* might live. He then **"took up his life again"** when he rose from the dead on the third day. There is therefore nothing at all left to condemn us but unbelief. On Judgment Day, only those who reject the sacrifice that Jesus made as the full payment for their sins will be judged unworthy of heaven. Sin can no longer condemn us, only unbelief, for **"the Lord has laid on him (on Jesus) the iniquity of us all."** (Isaiah 53:6) **"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in (who believe in) Christ Jesus."** (Romans 8:1) We need never again fear death and hell, for the one thing that separated us from our God has been removed - our sin.

This is the Good Shepherd that we have. This is what he foretold in our text when he said that he would **"lay down his life for the sheep...and take it up again."** Our Good Shepherd chained the Wolf to the foot of the cross.

This would be enough, wouldn't it? To have and enjoy the assurance of a perfect heavenly life after death would be enough all by itself. Jesus offers us more. When he calls himself the Good Shepherd he is also telling us that he will never forsake us. No *good* shepherd ever would. So too before ascending into heaven again he told us, **"I am with you always; to the end of the age."** Death and hell have been conquered for us, but still our Lord Jesus is our Good Shepherd.

Therefore take to heart that precious passage in Romans 8:28: **"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."** Having a Good Shepherd therefore means that we can thank our God even for the hard things he allows to come into our lives. We can thank him while we sign for that repair bill, check into the hospital, or watch a loved one suffer.

It means that we can thank him with equal gratitude for the sorrow and for the joy; for the times of plenty and for the times of shortage; for the times of sickness and for the times of health. Come what may, because we are sheep that enjoy a Good Shepherd, we can and should say, *"Thank you Lord. I know that you love me, that you are with me, and that you have something in mind for my good. While I don't pretend to always understand, I trust you, and I offer you my humble and heartfelt thanks."* Our Good Shepherd wants us with him for all eternity. He will allow whatever is necessary to get us there. Be content under his perfect care. That is what it means to be a sheep, and to live under the Good Shepherd. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Acts 4:1-12** And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, ² greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. ³ And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. ⁴ But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand. ⁵ ¶ On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, ⁶ with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. ⁷ And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name do you do this?" ⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹ if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, ¹⁰ let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead--by him this man is standing before you well. ¹¹ This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. ¹² 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."

^{ESV} **1 John 3:16-24** By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. ¹⁷ But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? ¹⁸ Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. ¹⁹ ¶ By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; ²⁰ for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. ²¹ Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; ²² and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. ²³ And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. ²⁴ Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.

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The Third Sunday after Easter – April 22, 2018

The Opening Hymn – 783 (Stanzas 1-3) (Brown Hymnal)

"Jesus, Shepherd of the Sheep"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson: (Acts 4:1-12) Note in particular two things about this reading. First, that Peter spoke by the power of the Holy Spirit. He not only therefore spoke truth, but the authority of his words makes them applicable for us today as well. Second, note the exclusivity that God the Holy Spirit wanted Peter to communicate to the people. There are not many paths to heaven; there is but one – through faith in Jesus Christ.

Psalms 23 (Supplement page 36)

The Gospel Lesson: (1 John 3:16-24) John here reminds us that a living faith will always produce the fruits of faith, or good works. While we know that we could never be saved by our works, what we do does tell us something about the condition of our faith. A faith that produces no fruits is dead; it is not a faith at all. Works are *not* necessary for salvation, but works are necessary, since a living faith always produces fruits.

The Confession of Faith -

Nicene Creed – (Supplement page 5)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 368 (Red Hymnal)

"The Lord My Pasture Shall Prepare"

The Sermon – John 10:11-18 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Our Good Shepherd"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 304 (Stanzas 1-5) (Red Hymnal)

"An Awe-full Mystery Is Here"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 783 (Stanzas 4-5) (Brown Hymnal)

"Jesus, Shepherd of the Sheep"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune** – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

Attendance - Sunday (31) Average (40)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today

-9:00 a.m.

– Sunday school and Bible Class

-10:00 a.m.

– Worship Service w/ Holy Communion

-11:15 a.m.

– Fellowship and coffee time

-11:30 a.m.

– Quarterly Voters Meeting

Wednesday

-6:00 p.m.

– Confirmation Class

-7:00 p.m.

– Midweek Bible Study

Next Sunday

-9:00 a.m.

– Sunday school and Bible Class

-10:00 a.m.

– Sunday Worship Service

-11:00 a.m.

– Fellowship and coffee time

-11:30 a.m.

– Women's Fellowship Meeting

CLC News – Pastor Matthew Hanel is considering calls both to Luther Memorial of Fond du Lac, WI and Berea of Inver Grove Heights, MN. The lone teacher graduate this year from the Education Department of Immanuel College, Michaela Winters, has been assigned to Messiah of Hales Corners, WI.

Quarterly Voters Meeting – A Quarterly Voters Meeting is scheduled for this morning during the fellowship hour.

Church Council Notes – All Council members were present for the Friday meeting. March offerings have eliminated our previous budget deficit. The Council will recommend the purchase of a replacement mower to the Voters. Members unable to provide in-home housing for the WCDC will be invited to provide motel lodging as an alternative. Next meeting – May 20.

Women's Fellowship – The Women's Fellowship is scheduled to meet during the fellowship hour next Sunday.

Spring Luncheon – A reminder that St. Paul is scheduled to host this year's Spring Luncheon on May 5. Please consult the two sign-up sheets on the mailbox table for more information.