**“I Myself Will Do It,” Declares The Lord**

**Ezekiel 34:11-16**

**Misericordias Domine – 5.1.2022**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Today’s sermon is sort of a continuation of, or another explanation of the main point of last week’s sermon.

Someone comes to their pastor and asks, “Pastor, what must I do to live a good Christian life?”

The pastor replies, “Believe in Jesus Christ.”

The beloved Christians says, “I believe, Pastor. But what I want to know, is how do I live a good Christian life?”

“I told you, believe in Jesus Christ.”

“Yes, pastor, but how do I live a good Christian life?”

“Explain what you would like me to tell you. What more do you think there is to it than believing in Jesus as God’s Christ?” the pastor asks.

Our friend responds, “I already believe in Jesus. Now I want to know what I must do so that I can be sure to go to heaven – what must I do to live a good Christian life.”

It is so sad how many of those who claim the name of Christian are stuck in just such false belief. They believe God will grant us heaven based upon how well they follow the rules.

It is sad, because they have been lied to. I have read articles in our local papers and on the internet, and I have heard things from the mouths of numerous pastors on TV and radio, who all teach the idea that we somehow earn a place before God by our works. If such a belief of works righteousness leading to salvation is followed, it surely shall lead to eternal destruction.

Many people believe that attending worship is their service to God. They believe that their worship gives worth to God, that their worship is gaining them points with God. Dear friends, God does not need anything from you to give Him worth. Too often our worship is an offense to God. What are you thinking about during the sermon and the prayer of the church – what is being said – of wandering to lunch, or the Brewers, or if you left the curling iron plugged in and on?

Maybe you noticed Helga Herpolscheimer go up for communion…and spent the rest of the service thinking about how you can get out of the building without talking to her. Should we even ask the question of how often our time in God’s house is less that focused upon God, His Word to use, and what we really should be focused upon? And our worship gives worth to God?

I could have told our friend, that the way to lead a good Christian life is to follow the commandments – to keep them in thought, word, and deed. As their pastor I could have suggested things they could do to show their love for God, and for their neighbor.

Indeed, there are things we should all be doing in love toward God and our neighbor.

But your salvation is not secured by your deeds. Yes, there are things God requires you to be doing. If you are not doing them, you are sinning. If you are not doing them, you are stoking God’s righteous wrath.

But what would have happened if I had told our dear friend what he must be doing, and sent him on his way thinking it was up to him to accomplish?

If left with that thought, one of couple things might have happened.

Left with such thinking, our friend would have come to realize how tough it is, impossible really, and may have become depressed – maybe even abandoning the faith.

Or, he could have looked around and compared himself to others and thought “I’m doing a pretty good job,” believing he was climbing the ladder to heaven.

Both thoughts are wrong, and create big problems.

Countless books that have reduced being a Christian to what we do – how to get right with God by works. Numerous books and false teachers tell you your job is to come to faith and come to God yourself, how you are to search Him out and find Him.

First, know that you and I are indeed supposed to keep God’s commandments. We are to love God: desire to hear His Word; know our need to have Him feed us with Word and Sacrament, and so attend services in His house regularly; use His name in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving; and avoid using His name when we are not speaking to Him. This is not optional, it is mandatory – so say the first three commandments.

Next, we must love our neighbors, even the ones who have hurt us or abused us. We are to care for our neighbors who cannot care for themselves. We are to, in all things, love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

However, there is no way that we can search God out and come to faith in Him. We are born spiritually, blind, deaf, dumb. To quote Scriptures, we were dead in trespasses and sins. Have you ever seen a dead man do anything? Dead men do not resuscitate themselves, new life has to be breathed into them.

We really do not want to have anything to do with God – at least not on His terms, and according to His will and commands.

Sadly, all we do is fail – at every turn – either to love God, or love our neighbor. We are like sheep who love to wander. We love to wander away from God, from His Word, and from His will. Although, we love to think that we do not.

That is why I love today’s readings for Misericordias Domine – a Latin term meaning “the merciful heart of the Lord.” It is so true, God’s heart is incredibly merciful to us.

In our Gospel, Jesus tells us that He is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep. He lays down His life unto death upon the cross and purchases forgiveness with His own precious blood shed for you and me – the sheep who love to wander.

In our Epistle, we are reminded of the fact that Jesus bore our sins in His body on the tree of the cross, and that by His wounds we are healed – forgiven. We are to live in that forgiveness, live in His righteousness.

But this Old Testament lesson is truly amazing.

Sadly, many Christians believe that the Old Testament is the Law, and the New Testament is the Gospel. It is incredible how many times Christians will say something like, “We’re people of the New Testament, not the Old Testament.” And yet, the merciful heart of our Lord is so vibrantly exposed and brilliantly expressed in our Old Testament text from Ezekiel.

Fifteen times in these six verses, God declares what He will do for His people. He also says that He will destroy the fat and the strong – that He will destroy those who rely upon themselves, who feel they are good enough by their work, and who prey upon others.

Yes, fifteen times He states what He will do for His people. It is He who does for His people. Were you listening? Hear them again:

I myself will search for My sheep,

I will seek them out,

As a shepherd seeks out his flock, so will I seek out My sheep

I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered

I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries,

I will bring them into their own land.

I will feed them on the mountains of Israel

I will feed them with good pasture,

I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep,

I myself will make them lie down,

I will seek the lost,

I will bring back the strayed,

I will bind up the injured,

I will strengthen the weak,

I will feed them in justice.

Who is doing all the work? You? No!!! God is!

It is easy to hear why today is also often called Good Shepherd Sunday. We are sheep who love to wander in the wilderness of the world, and wallow in the decadence of sin. But thanks be to our God, for we the sheep would never choose Him as our Shepherd, but He chooses us as His sheep. He sought us out because we were running from Him, and brought to Himself in the waters of baptism. He has brought us from numerous places to be His people – from Embarrass, Algoma, Clintonville, Marion, Detroit, Ohio, Connecticut, California, even from foreign lands and places. Just as He brought MacKenzie to be His own through the waters of her baptism today.

Jesus connects Himself to this text. He is the one foretold to do all these things. So He does. He lays down His life for His sheep on the cross – He lays it down; nobody takes it from Him – and then He victoriously rose on the third day.

Jesus comes to us in Word and Sacrament. He brings us to His house, His land, His mountain, His pasture – to this very place – He makes us to lie down, to bind up the wounds of our sinfulness with His Word, strengthens us to live in His grace, and feeds us unto life everlasting with His precious body and blood.

“I will do it,” declares the Lord, and He does. Ezekiel’s prophecy tells the work of God’s Son, the Good Shepherd. It declares to us the merciful heart of God who does not leave us to our own devices, but comes to us and saves. Thanks be to God, for He has done – and is doing it – in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.