**The Good Shepherd**

**John 10:11-16**

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

I was talking with someone awhile back whom I had just met while out fishing. As you would guess, the conversation progressed, and I asked what they did for a living. And then of course, they asked me, “So, what do you do?” “I’m a pastor!” “Really? What kind?” “I am a Lutheran, Missouri Synod brand.” “Cool!”

We talked a little bit about what they did, you know how that goes. Anyway, this person finally asked me, “So, are you a good pastor?”

I must admit, I was not sure exactly what they meant by the question as my mind went racing in a number of directions, all basically revolving around, “what do they mean by good?”

My mind was spinning around what they might have meant by the question.

Are you a good pastor, do you love your people?

Are you a good pastor, faithful to the Scripture in all you teach?

Are you a good pastor, preaching the Word of God in truth and purity, and administering the sacraments in accordance with the Word of Christ?

Are you a good pastor, is your church growing?

Are you a good pastor, do your people love you?

Are you a good pastor, doing what the people want you to do?

Are you a good pastor, do you do fun stuff in church?

Are you a good pastor, bending over backwards, sacrificing your conscience, to do what people want – even when you know God’s Word is against their wishes?

I ran all these thoughts in my head in a moment’s time as I pondered, “What exactly do they mean by asking ‘Are you a good pastor?’”

I guess I must have looked confused, because they went on to explain exactly what they meant by the question, wanting to know if I kept people’s interest during the sermon or if I was boring.

Well, which person, with even an ounce of ego would say, “Nope, I’m a lousy pastor. I preach with a monotone. I haven’t had a decent sermon in 10 years. In fact, I hate to preach sermons.”

After an awkward silence, I finally said, “I’d like to think so, but only God can answer that question. Some people might think I am a good pastor, and I am sure there are those who are sure I am not a good pastor. But with people, too often it is emotions that come into play in making such a judgment, while God only wants pastors to be faithful to His Word and will.”

When it came time to prepare for, and then write this sermon, as I read the first few lines of today’s Gospel lesson, *I am the good shepherd,* that question came back into my mind, “are you a good pastor.”

I do try to be faithful to God’s Word, and not swayed by emotions – mine or anybody else’s. I also know my own sinful nature attempts to avoid conflict, and so, it sometimes moves me to be less than faithful in order to do so. Sometimes, when I am faithful to God’s Word, it causes conflict with some people, because God’s Word is not always in accordance with man’s desires.

I don’t know if you know it or not, but the word pastor means shepherd. To pastor is to ‘to tend, keep, pasture, feed, guard.’ It all came back to me, am I a good pastor? Am I a good shepherd?

I do not know if I am or not. I ***do*** know that I am ***not*** ***THE*** Good Shepherd. All I am at best, is an under-shepherd. I have been given to tend, keep, pasture, feed, and guard those entrusted to my care by the Good Shepherd, caring for those whom He has called me to care for. I am only a steward, only the one who cares for those entrusted to his care.

All I can do is be faithful to the Good Shepherd and listen to His directions as given in the Holy Scripture. Shepherds do not let the sheep decide where to graze or where to drink. Nor do shepherds let the sheep wander wherever they want to, but he protects them from the dangers of cliff, storm, starvation, and even ravenous wolves that would come dressed in sheep’s clothing or shepherd’s attire.

As I said, I am not ***the*** Good Shepherd. I cannot be, for I am nothing more than a sheep myself – a sheep that loves to wander – another sheep for whom the Good Shepherd had to lay down His life.

Only the Good Shepherd owns the sheep, and He does so because He has purchased them. He bought them, not with gold or silver, but with His holy precious blood and His innocent suffering and death, that they might be His own and live under Him in His kingdom.

But sheep love to wander. They love to go where they want and do what they want to do. When the Shepherd fetches them back, they bleat and scream, maybe even struggle against the Shepherd’s staff.

Then comes the wolf, that is, the devil. He kills and devours sheep. A sheep does not stand a chance against a wolf. It can only bleat and run. It cannot hide and it cannot fight. It can only be killed – and it will be. The wolf comes in to snatch the sheep or to scatter them so that they are easy pickings, one by one. He attacks the sheep because that is his nature.

His attack is two-fold. First, Satan leads the sheep into sin. Satan may encourage them to think their behavior is acceptable. Usually this is done by leading people to doubt God’s Word in some way or other – that God’s Word and will have somehow changed, that God’s Word was for a specific people in a specific time, and that was long ago, we now live in a new, more educated age. Some others he gets to simply ignore God’s Word all together.

Once ensnared in sin, Satan keeps on working. Satan loves to lead those who have sinned to feel guilty over their sin. He deceives them into believing that they are lousy Christians, such bad sinners that God cannot possibly love them. If they fall into that trap, the sheep, cut off from the voice of the Good Shepherd will die.

As Jesus states, The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. Satan tempted Jesus, in every way, just as we are tempted, but without sin. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth. When people spoke ill of Him and used foul language at Him, He did not return it in kind. Even as they nailed Him to the tree, mocked Him, and spat upon Him, Jesus begged His Father to forgive them.

It was this Jesus Christ who bore in his own body, your sins. He took them into His own flesh and died for them on the cross. He allowed the wolf to attack Him, claim that He was guilty of sin and deserving of death. As the Good Shepherd dies, Satan tries to claim the victory. But, it is ***NOT*** Satan’s victory, it is the Good Shepherd’s victory. With the empty tomb of Easter morning, Good Friday’s victory over sin, guilt, and the power of the devil is certified.

Sin and death were defeated on the cross, Christ’s resurrection is God’s justification of that victory.

You see, this is how the Good Shepherd knows His own, He knows their sins, for He bore them.

He knows their temptations, for He has endured them.

He knows their fears, for He has faced them.

The Good Shepherd knows the sheep better than they know themselves. The Good Shepherd calls the sheep to Himself with His own voice, the voice of the Gospel proclaimed in Word and Sacrament.

It is the devil who drives the individual Christian away from the church and away from the voice of the Good Shepherd. The sheep recognize the voice of their shepherd. As long as they hear His voice they are safe because all they need to do is stay close to that voice and their shepherd will protect them from the wolf. They are unable protect themselves, but the Shepherd can.

This is why you and I need to gather around the voice of the shepherd faithfully. No, the voice of the Good Shepherd is not found in every church. There are some churches where the true voice of the Good Shepherd is perverted. There are churches where Satan is dressed in clerical garb and people are pointed to themselves, to their own works, deceived into thinking they have something to do with their salvation.

You need to hear the gospel, ***AND*** you need to hear the devil’s lies called what they are.

First, you need to be convicted in your conscience of your sinfulness. God knows all about you, His Law needs to do its work. He sees you as you really are. But, the Good Shepherd does not reject you on account of your sins and leave you to fend off the wolves by yourself. You need to hear the Gospel. You need to hear and know that Jesus takes those condemning sins into Himself and suffers your condemnation for you. This is what it means that the Good Shepherd gives his life for the sheep. That is the Gospel, not some delusion proclaimed that tries to teach you how you can make yourself a better Christian, not some do-it-yourself guide to Christian life – those are nothing more than Satan’s lies.

Listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd, your sins are forgiven.

Listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd, take eat; this is my body… take drink; this cup is the new testament in my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.

The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep, that the sheep might be His forever. Amen.