**One Flock, One Shepherd**

**John 10:11-16**

**Misericordias Domini**

Our text for meditation is the Gospel lesson read earlier as recorded by the evangelist St. John.

We pray Luther's Prayer before the sermon: Eternal God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, give us Your Holy Spirit who writes the preached Word into our hearts. May we receive and believe it and be cheered and comforted by it in eternity. Glorify Your Word in our hearts and make it so bright and warm that we may find pleasure in it, through Your Holy Spirit think what is right, and by Your power, fulfill the Word, for the sake of Jesus Christ, Your Son our Lord. Amen.

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

Did you hear our text – talking about sheep and the Good Shepherd? How many of you here are sheep? You know, white, wooly animals who make a “baaa-ing” noise, eat green grass, and need to be cared for by a shepherd? None of us would think of ourselves that way. And yet, we are taught as Christians to think of ourselves like unto sheep, needing to be cared for and tended.

Then there is the Shepherd. Is Jesus really a shepherd, with a shepherd’s crook, running around and fending off the wolves, leading white, wooly, animals to the brook for water and then into the highland pastures to eat? Of course not! And yet, we are taught to think of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. In fact, Jesus is the shepherd which every shepherd should emulate, willing to lay down His life for the sheep.

How many of you like to think of yourselves as sheep? It really is not a pretty picture. Sheep are rather stupid, they love to wander off and often get themselves into trouble. Are they stupid? Or, do they wander about satisfying their flesh, not really thinking about their situation? That is why shepherd’s need to be attentive at all times. Trying only to satisfy their flesh, sheep get caught in briars and brambles. Trying only to satisfy their flesh, sheep are easy prey to wolves and other predators.

We do not think of ourselves that way. We are not stupid! We can take care of ourselves. We know what we are supposed to do and not do. We know what God expects us to be accomplishing, and what He expects us to avoid.

We like to think that we avoid the briars and brambles, the sins that ensnare us. Really? Isaiah describes you and me this way, long before Jesus took on human flesh. *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.* (Is. 53:6)

It is so true, we fall into sin on every hand. In fact, each of us has our own pet sin that entices us and we regularly fall into it. Of course, we try to excuse it. What is the sin you love to excuse?

 The drunkard excuses his sin by proclaiming, “Jesus made wine at the wedding.” But the same Jesus tells us to be sober and vigilant – as much as many think it is true, you cannot be drunk and sober at the same time.

 As someone’s reputation is ruined beyond repair because someone opened their mouth, the offending gossiper proclaims their excuse, “But I was only telling the truth, it wasn’t a lie.” What happened to “putting the best construction on everything?”

Jesus said that before we come to the altar, if we remember that we are unreconciled with someone, we should leave our gift at the altar, go be reconciled with our brother, and then come back to that altar. How many just go to a different church so they do not have to commune at the same altar? People can have their cake and eat it too – they can hold their grudge and not be bothered by it. How many do this thinking that God understands? It is sinful to continue to hold a grudge. Jesus declares, *“For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”*  (Mt. 6:14-15)

We are all sheep that like to wander.

But there is even more… sheep need the protection of the Shepherd.

Of course, you do not… you are perfectly capable of recognizing and fending off any wolves without any assistance. You know falsehood when you hear it. Really? Do you recognize the wolves, even when hidden in sheep’s clothing? Jesus is not as sure as many seem to be, He says, *"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.”* (Mt. 7:15)

God moved Isaiah to warn that people are like sheep, that they wander their own way. After Christ’s ascension, the Spirit moves Paul to warn pastors about the way that people will not only wander their own way as individuals, but that they will purposefully seek out the wolves in sheep’s clothing. God, through Paul’s pen prophesies that people will look for those claiming to be shepherds, but are only saying what people want to hear.

He warns the young pastor Timothy: *For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.* (2 Tim. 4:3-4)

When people do not like what they hear from faithful under-shepherds, they look around for something else, and there is always a pastor out there who will teach what people what they want to hear. There are those claiming to be pastors who are more than happy to do what the people want them to do, and to say what they want to hear.

These pastors will do so because they are a hired hand. These men have taken on the task of pastor because of the pay check, not because they are faithful to the Good Shepherd. These men give the sheep whatever the sheep bleat and squeal for, even when it is not in agreement with the Will or Word of the Good Shepherd. They do this because if the sheep are happy, then their life is good.

The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. Our Epistle said it this way. *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

We are sheep, gone astray, each to his or her own way. We are sinners in need of forgiveness. That is what Christ purchased with His own precious blood, and His innocent suffering and death.

Christ Himself searches for and seeks out His sheep. It is He who does the work in baptism. It is He who seeks out the sheep, those whom He Himself bought with His own precious blood. He makes them a part of the one flock through the waters of baptism.

Jesus is the One Shepherd. He feeds His One Flock. That flock is made up of all those who trust His Word, and in repentance trust solely in the forgiveness granted by the Shepherd. The members of that one flock gather where the Shepherds voice is heard – they gather where the Gospel is taught in truth and purity and the Sacraments the Good Shepherd instituted, are administered according to His command.

But even those pastors who are not hired hands, are still sinners in need of the tender care of the Good Shepherd. These under-shepherds know and believe that only the voice of the Shepherd, calling out to them in the purity of the Gospel will heal them and grant them life. There is nothing said about these pastors in our Gospel reading today, for everything that they do points not to themselves, but to Christ. All the teach, proclaim, and deliver points always to the One who gave His life for the sheep and gives His life to the sheep in Word and Sacrament.

Listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd, Christ. Hear Him speak to you, for His Spirit works in the word. It is that Word which calls, gathers, enlightens and the whole flock and keeps it in the true faith. It is Christ who feeds and nourishes you in His Word. He sets His table in the midst of the flock, He gives you to eat and drink of His own body and blood, which stave off your enemies sin and death.

It is the will of the Shepherd that His flock would dwell in His own house all their days, and so His goodness and mercy follow you all the days of your life. It is the Shepherd who keeps you! He gathers you with His voice, and blesses you with His grace. Therefore, it is solely by the Shepherd’s own work, by His own hand, that there is one flock. Thanks and praise to His holy name – for Jesus, God’s Christ, is the Good Shepherd. Amen.