**The Good Shepherd**

**John 10:11-16**

Misericordias Domine – Easter 3

04.19.2023

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

In my sermon preparation, one of things I sometimes do is read old sermons – I don’t like too much repetition. Having said that, there was some great stuff in the sermon I wrote for 2010 – much of it worth revising and repeating.

I remember a number of conversations with strangers which were similar, following some similar veins. As these conversations progressed, we inquired what the other did for a living. This of course led to my revelation to them, “I’m a pastor!” “Really? What kind?” “I am a Lutheran, Missouri Synod brand.” “Cool!”

On a couple occasions, I was asked, “So, are you a good pastor?”

I must admit, no matter how often I am asked that, every time, my mind starts racing in a number of directions, all basically the same thing, “what do they mean by good?”

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

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, is your church growing?

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

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

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

These seem to be the thoughts that percolate in my head every time I ponder, “What exactly do they mean by asking ‘Are you a good pastor?’”

I must always get a confused look on my face, because they often explain exactly what they meant by the question. And it is surprising how often they all mean the same thing. They want to know if I keep people’s interest during the sermon or if I am boring.

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

I am sure there is an awkward silence. I am trying to consider what to say. I have come to have a patterned response, usually in something like this manner, “I’d like to think I am a good pastor, 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. I also that that too often, as your question seems to indicate, it is emotions that come into play in making such a judgment. God only wants Pastors to be faithful to His Word and will. I guess I’ll wait for His critique on the last day. Until then, I am only seeking to be faithful. You could come join us on a Sunday morning and listen for yourself what exactly that means and how it plays out.”

Every time I read the first line of today’s Gospel lesson, *I am the Good Shepherd,* that question came back into my mind, “are you a good pastor.”

It is my goal 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 – and it ruffled their feathers on a particular day.

That word, ‘pastor,’ originally meant ‘shepherd’. As a verb, ‘to pastor’ is to “tend, keep, pasture, feed, guard domestic animals, especially sheep” This is something I regularly ask myself, “Am I a good pastor? Am I a good shepherd?”

I don’t know if I am or not – according to the definition many people want to use regarding ‘a good pastor” in their minds.

What I do know, is that I am not ***THE*** Good Shepherd. All I am at the best, is an under-shepherd. I have been given the task to tend, keep, pasture, feed, and guard those entrusted to my care by The Good Shepherd. I am to care for those whom He has called me to care for – in the manner He, The Chief Shepherd, directs for their 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 – they make sure that the food is good and the water pure. Nor do shepherds let the sheep wander wherever they want. A shepherd 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.

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. He owns them 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. Sheep love to go where they want and do what they want to do. When the Shepherd fetches them back, they bleat and scream, they may even struggle against the Shepherd’s staff.

When the wolf comes, that is, the devil, he kills and devours sheep. A sheep does not stand a chance against a wolf. Sheep can only bleat and run. But sheep cannot hide, nor can they fight. Sheep can only be killed, and they 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.

Satan’s attack is two-fold. First, Satan entices the sheep into sin. That is not too hard, sheep love to wander – we all fall into sin easily.

Once ensnared in sin, it is easy pickings, get them to feel guilty, that they’re lousy Christians. If this happens, the sheep, cut off from the voice of the Good Shepherd will die.

But the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. Satan tempted Jesus, in every way, just as we were 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, to claim that He was guilty of sin and deserving of death. In this manner the Good Shepherd dies. Satan claims the victory. But it is not Satan’s victory. It is the Good Shepherd’s victory. On the cross, Jesus defeats sin – by dying for it, the sinless for the guilty – sin, Satan’s chief weapon, is defeated. Defeated and overcome with sin, is death.

Three days later, the empty tomb of Easter morning, Good Friday’s victory over sin, guilt, and the power of the devil is proclaimed.

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

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.

He 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.

The devil tries desperately to drive individual Christians away from the church and away from the voice of the Good Shepherd. Sheep that do not heed, or ignore the Shepherd’s voice are in danger of being slain by the wolf.

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 by which the Shepherd protects them from the wolf. Sheep cannot protect themselves, but the Shepherd can.

This is why you and I need to gather around the voice of the Shepherd faithfully. And not just to any church, but gather where the true voice of the Good Shepherd is proclaimed. We need to hear the gospel. We need to hear the devil’s lies called what they are.

We need to be convicted in our conscience of our sinfulness. No, this is not always pleasant. Sheep may bleat in complaint. God knows all about you, His Law needs to do its work. He sees you as you really are. The Good Shepherd does not reject you – or me – on account of our sinfulness. He does not leave you to fend off the wolves by yourself. You need to hear the Gospel. Jesus takes those condemning sins upon 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 which tries to teach you how you can make yourself a better Christian. This is not some do-it-yourself guide to Christian life – that would just be more of Satan’s lies.

No one took the life of the Good Shepherd from Him. He laid it down of His own accord. He laid it down for you, only to take it up again on the third day.

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 – now and forever. Amen.