

Fourth Sunday of Easter

“The Precious Good Shepherd, Jesus, - caretaker of your soul!” (1 Peter 2:25)

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Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, our precious Good Shepherd who cares for our souls.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this Fourth Sunday of Easter is from 1 Peter 2:25

“25 For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”

Here ends our text.

“You were like sheep.” Of all the animals to be compared with, God chose to liken us to sheep. Well, snake was already taken by the evil one. Although sometimes, Jesus did call humans, that is the hypocritical unbelieving Jewish leaders a “brood of vipers”. Goats God also reserved for unbelievers. But believers in Jesus, He called sheep.

The main reason we are likened to sheep is as our text says we have gone astray. A modern day farmer who raises sheep has this to say about them.

“Sometimes sheep seem to have an amazing ability to make some fairly poor decisions that can result in their own injury or death.

This could be wandering off from the flock, getting stuck in a fence or even something as simple as laying down wrong. Sheep are much better at getting into problems than getting out of them.

A shepherd’s job is to reduce the chances that a sheep has to make these bad decisions, by making the area as sheep proof as he can.

While no farm is perfect and sheep can always find new and creative ways to surprise you, a shepherd will learn to minimize the opportunities for sheep to make bad decisions.”

Bad decisions. Well Isaiah 53:6 puts it this way which Peter is referring to in his epistle.

“All we like sheep have gone astray;

We have turned, every one, to his own way;

The “like sheep going astray” refers to all people as Isaiah says— you and me included. Bad decisions means sinful decisions, self- centered decisions to follow my own sinful path rather than God.

And yet, God came to the rescue. He sent His Son Jesus. So, the second half of Isaiah 53:6 says, **“And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”**

Jesus became a sheep, the sacrificial Lamb, spotless and pure. As Peter says in our epistle in the verses before our text.

“Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth”;

23 who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; 24 who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.”

This is why our Good Shepherd is so precious to us. He didn’t run from the cross but willingly laid down His life for all people. The hireling runs, but the Good Shepherd loves His sheep so much that He gives His life for them. That’s what our Gospel reading from John 10 so beautiful tells us.

“11 “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.”

In last Sunday’s text from 1 Peter chapter 1, we heard how our redemption is precious because of the precious blood of Jesus which paid for the sins of all people, including you and me.

“knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”

So precious is our redemption that God foreordained it before the foundation of the world. And He elected us in Christ to be His special people.

This leads us to the second part of our text, that the sheep have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of their souls. How did this return happen? Did the sheep find their way back on their own? Ephesians chapter 1 tells us how. God chose us. God found us. God brought us back into His sheepfold. God did it all!

“3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.”

“In Christ” – every spiritual blessing is given to us because of our connection of faith in Christ. In repentance, our hearts have returned to God by His gracious calling. Peter describes this new relationship that we have with God.

We are completely made new again – reborn Peter said in chapter 1. We talked about the things we recycle last Sunday. We are completely remade, refashioned by God – better than recycled. Peter begins chapter 2 by calling us newborn babes who need to drink the pure milk of the Word of God. No junk food of false teaching should enter our bodies. Just the purest doctrine of God’s Word for a new beautiful babe that needs the best to grow strong.

So we heard on the Sunday right after Easter these words from 1 Peter.

“2 as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.”

And then comes a most beautiful description of the newborn believers in Jesus.

“9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.”

The Good Shepherd has done it all for us straying, defenseless, and lost sheep. He chose us and made us His special people by calling us out of darkness with the Good News of the Gospel of salvation. And He brought us into His marvelous light. Once not a people, but now a people of God. Our precious Good Shepherd has given us His mercy through faith.

He calls us by name and leads us to the green pastures of His mercy and forgiveness in His Word and Sacraments. You and I, His sheep are in God’s house today grazing on the Good News of the Gospel in His Word. We heard how the early church did it by going to the temple and continuing in the doctrine of the apostles. And they also were fed with the Lord’s Supper, the breaking of bread in the unity of their one faith in the Good Shepherd.

So also this morning, the Good Shepherd gives us His very body and blood in the Lord's Supper when He laid down His life on the cross. Given and shed for your forgiveness!

Oh, how we need to be strengthened and fed to continue to hear the Good Shepherd's voice alone in this mixed up world of strange voices leading people astray. Oh, how we need to be strengthened and fed by the Good Shepherd to bear the injustices that we as His sheep will face as His followers.

So Peter told us in our epistle today.

“But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. 21 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:”

And as we follow the Good Shepherd in this life, we joyfully hear the Good News from Psalm 23 that because

**“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.
3 He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.”**

Jesus calls Himself the Door for the sheep for through Him alone are we fed with the green pastures of His gracious Word. And through Him alone do the sheep pass through the Door into His eternal kingdom of Heaven. So, Revelation 7 which we know so well, pictures the Good Shepherd in heaven with His sheep.

““These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. 16 They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; 17 for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

Oh how precious is the Good Shepherd to His sheep. How precious is your Good Shepherd to you – now and eternally! Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your heart and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)