

Misericordias Domini
St. John 10:11-16
April 14th, 2024
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

I AM the Good Shepherd

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Sermon Text:

“I AM the Good Shepherd; and I know Mine own, and Mine own know Me, even as the Father knoweth Me, and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.”

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O God, Who didst will Thine Only-Begotten Son to learn obedience by the things which He suffered, that, being thus made perfect, He might become the Author of eternal salvation unto all that obey Him: work in us, we beseech Thee, such inward conformity with His holy patience as may cause us to have part also in His glorious power, that so, walking not after the flesh, but after the Spirit, we may be able to serve Thee all our days in newness of mind and life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Hallelujah! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Hallelujah!

My dear sheep, St. Peter tells us in the Epistle reading today from his First Epistle to the Saints that the Lord + Jesus, the Christ, is our Bishop and Shepherd. He is the Bishop and Shepherd of our souls. That should prompt us to ask at least two questions: “What is a bishop?” and, “What is a shepherd?” A bishop is someone who oversees us. That is what that word literally means. It is someone who has the charge to watch over somebody else. A bishop is a caretaker. St. Peter tells us that the Lord + Jesus is a Bishop of our souls. He is in charge of watching over, overseeing, taking care of our souls. This is what a good bishop does. He takes good care of those with whom he has been given charge over.

Our Lord + Jesus is both a Bishop of our souls, and also a Shepherd of our souls. Our Lord tells us His Apostles, and us, in the Gospel reading from the Apostle and Evangelist St. John that He is the Good Shepherd. Again, this should prompt us to ask, “What is a shepherd?” and, “What makes a shepherd good?” A shepherd is someone who cares for sheep. What makes the shepherd “good” then? Our Lord tells us the answer in the Gospel reading. A good shepherd is someone who is willing to lay down his life for the sheep.

When we see images of sheep and shepherds, we see the sheep peacefully grazing in pastureland. The sheep have no care or concern in these pictures. The sheep are safely grazing on the grass in the pasture. If a shepherd appears in the image, he is amongst the sheep. He may even have a lamb on his shoulders. We have one like that on our wall with all the icons. The picture evokes in a us sense of peace. The sheep have nothing to worry about and the shepherd is there taking care

of the sheep to maintain their peace and serenity.

If these images of sheep and images show a peaceful scene, then why does our Lord + Jesus tell us that He is willing to lay down His life for the sheep? It means that things are not as peaceful in sheepfolds as these serene pictures make it out to be. The same is true of a bishop. If he is given the charge to watch over those to whom he has been given charge, that means he must have to protect them from something. For the shepherd, the danger lies in the predators that seek to prey upon the sheep. The most common enemy presented to us in the holy Scriptures is the wolf. This is the enemy listed by our Lord in the Gospel pericope for today. The wolf desires to make a meal out of the sheep. It desires to destroy the sheep; to rend its flesh and leave its corpse dead and forgotten.

This is obviously an image of the devil. The devil wishes to destroy mankind. He desires to lead all of mankind into Hell. He is already leading all unbelievers into the pits of Hell. That is why his vitriol is especially pointed at the Church. The wild goats he can devour at his whim. The sheep in the sheepfold, protected by the shepherd, he also desires to lead to destruction. Therefore, he uses all of his arts to attack and destroy the sheep safely grazing in the pastures of the Church. This is why we as members of the Church should not stray from the pasture; we should not stray from the Church. When we fail to come to this holy house to be fed with the Word of God; to be protected from the teeth and jaws of the wily wolf by hearing the salutary Gospel of what our Lord + Jesus has done for us, then we put ourselves in danger of being devoured by the devil.

He prowls around us with every art that he has. He aims disease, despair, our own sins, the wrong conditions of the world, the aging and failing of our bodies, and every other device to lead us away from the pasture of the Church. And when he does, he easily devours our souls. He leads us into doubt and despair. He will also lead us into self-righteous pride. Making us believe that we really do not need to be in the Church whenever it gathers together. For he tells our consciences the lie that we can be a Christian all by our lonesome and be just fine. That is where the devil wants us, out on an island, away from the pastures of the Church, so that he can easily devour our souls. When we separate ourselves from the regular feeding and watering of the Word of God and the receiving of the Blessed Sacraments the devil can easily swoop in and lead us into either despair or self-righteousness.

This is why we have a Good Shepherd. This is why our Lord + Jesus, the Christ is the Bishop and Shepherd of our souls. For He is willing to lay down His life for the sheep. He is willing to take the wounds with which the devil would hurt us. The Good Shepherd, our Lord + Jesus, laid down His life for us on the tree of the holy cross. He took our place in the jaws of death and Hell so that we do not have to endure the pain and suffering of their powers.

Not only did He lay down His life for us poor, miserable wandering sheep, but He also took us from the wilderness and placed us into the pasture of the Church. Here is this place He is both our Shepherd and our Bishop. Here in this place, He watches over us so that not one of us may fall prey to the teeth of the wolf. Here in the Church, He gives us plenty of food and water—all that we need to support us. We have the pure preaching of the Word of God and the right administration of the Blessed Sacraments as He instituted them. These means feed and water us with the good news of salvation found in the Lord + Jesus, the Christ alone.

All our sins, all our miseries are rendered silent and useless when we hear the Gospel that in the Christ, we have the remission of all of our sins. In the Gospel, we hear that the worries and stresses of this life can only harm us in this life and in this flesh, for our Bishop and Shepherd delivers us from death and Hell. He brings us into an eternal home with Him in Heaven. All of the suffering we endure in this life will cease when we are called to our eternal home in Heaven. There we will enjoy eternal peace and serenity in the eternal pastureland of Heaven. There we as sheep of the Bishop and Shepherd of our souls will safely graze forever and ever. Therefore, we need not worry and sorrow over

the miseries and sins of this life, for our Bishop and Shepherd watches over us to bring us safely into the eternal pastureland of Heaven.

This is why He has placed over us earthly bishops and shepherds. They feed us with the means of grace, and protect us from the arts and crafts of the devil and his horde. A shepherd is willing to lay down his life for the sheep. This is why we refer to our spiritual shepherds as “pastor.” The term “pastor” is derived from the word for shepherd. So, when we call someone “pastor” we are calling them our shepherd. The good pastor should be willing to lay down his life for the sheep. He may not have to face physical violence like our Lord + Jesus did in His Passion and death, but the pastor will have to face the arts and crafts of the devil who uses the false ideologies and theologies of the world to lead the sheep astray if he can.

This is why a pastor is also a bishop, just like our Lord + Jesus is a Bishop of our souls. The pastor watches over our souls, he cares for our souls. For he must give an account of his shepherding on the Last Day before the judgment seat of the Lord + Jesus. But a good pastor—a good bishop—does not fear the judgment. He fears what the devil can do to the poor sheep who stray from the flock. This is why the good pastor is always exhorting his flock with the pure Word of God; warning them about the false theologies and gods with which the world would lead the sheep away from the sheepfold. He does this tirelessly for he knows that the enemy never sleeps or slumbers in his pursuit to devour and destroy the sheep.

This is how we can tell whether we have a good shepherd, or a hireling. For a hireling will spew the same false vitriol of the world. It will confirm the lies of the world and lead one down the path to eternal destruction. For he cares not to lay down his life for the sheep, but loves the praise of men rather than the praise of the Lord God.

Therefore, my dear sheep, let us cling to the Great Bishop and Shepherd of our souls. For our Lord + Jesus, the Christ, has willingly laid down His life for us poor wandering sheep. He has placed us into this pastureland of the Church, which feeds us with the rich Word of God and the Blessed Sacraments. He has placed overseers and pastors over us to guide and protect us on our journey to the eternal pastures of Heaven. He does all this so that we might enjoy forever and ever the bountiful gifts that He has prepared for us in Heaven. Let us not, therefore, stray from this good pasture in which He has placed us, but readily come here to the place He has given to us to come and receive these gifts from the ministers he has placed before us for this task. And if we are physically unable to come to this holy house, then let us call the pastors and charge them to come to us and feed us with the Word of God and Blessed Sacraments, so that we might always be protected from the teeth and jaws of the wily wolf, and that we may live forever in Heaven with all the saints and angels who are there now. Hallelujah! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Hallelujah! In the Name of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Almighty God, be pleased to accompany Thy Word with Thy Holy Spirit and grant that Thy Word would increase faith in us; bring into the Way of Truth all such as have erred; turn the hearts of the unrepentant; and for sake of Thy Name grant succor to all heavy hearts and those who are heavy-laden, that they may through the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ be relieved and preserved so that they succumb not to the temptation of despair but rather that they gain the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!