

May 8, 2022
Fourth Sunday of Easter
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

John 10:22-30 (Acts 20:17-35; Revelation 7:9-17)

HEAR THE VOICE OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

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

Our text for meditation today comes from the Gospel according to St John, the 10th chapter, which you heard read earlier.

Every day it seems that the corruption and evil of this sinful and darkened world reaches a higher intensity. But to borrow the words of King Solomon:

“... there is nothing new under the sun.” (Ecclesiastes 1:9)

What has been will be. In this life there **will be** natural disasters and man-made catastrophes. There **will be** political lies, scheming, and greed. There **will be** individual selfishness, deceit, and covetousness, murder and abuse, robbery and assault, wars and rumors of wars. There is nothing new under the sun. Jesus says:

“In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

Tribulation in the world began in the Garden of Eden after our ancestors, Adam and Eve, disobeyed God, giving in to temptation, plunging all creation into sin. And the progression of your temptation to sin is no different than it was in the beginning. First the devil tempts you to doubt about God’s Word, asking:

“Did God actually say...” (Genesis 3:1)

He then presses you to outright reject God’s Word and set your own standard of right and wrong so that you define your own truth. Because you and I are by nature enemies of God, (cf: Ephesians 2:3, 4:22) the old nature within us, which desires to be its own god, is lured and enticed by desire, turns its back on God, dives headlong into sin and transgression, and reaps its own self-created tribulation.

There is nothing new under the sun. The Bible is filled with the factual accounts of God’s most pious servants – and their failures, their sin, and their call to repentance. Your own story is no different. Your life is littered with your own temptations, failures, transgression. God calls you to repentance and faith in Christ Jesus.

Today is Good Shepherd Sunday. Every year on the Fourth Sunday of Easter, our Gospel reading is a portion of the tenth chapter of St John's Gospel which is known as the Good Shepherd chapter. Jesus says:

"I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me... and I lay down my life for the sheep." (John 10:14-15)

This is Good News for you, me, and all people living in this corrupted and deteriorating world. Jesus has overcome the world, so you can take heart in the midst of your trials and tribulation, even while you wrestle with your own foolish and darkened heart, for in today's text, Jesus gives you a twofold promise against yourself and your weakness and doubt. (cf: Kretzmann, The Popular Commentary of the Bible, NT Vol. 1, 469) He says:

"²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand." (John 10:27-29)

When Jesus names Himself as the Good Shepherd, He is identifying Himself with Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament. All faithful Jews recognized Yahweh as Israel's Shepherd who sent prophets, judges, and kings to be His under-shepherds and lead them. After so many of the under-shepherds were unfaithful, God appointed his servant David as a faithful under-shepherd. (cf: Ezekiel 34:11-24).

In the 23rd Psalm, David declares that because the Lord is his Shepherd, he wants for nothing. He has everything he needs – and to this very day the Good Shepherd generously and lovingly provides everything needed to support body and life, to all people: the righteous and the unrighteous. (cf: Matthew 5:45) He continues to send His under-shepherds – pastors – to watch over and lead His flock by proclaiming the Word of the Good Shepherd and administering His Sacraments.

You might wonder how you can hear ***Jesus' voice*** by listening to your ***pastor's voice*** as he proclaims God's Word. New Testament commentator Richard Lenski rightly points out:

"[God's] 'word' signifies the contents, the 'voice,' the tone, sound, [and] personal peculiarity [of Jesus]. Both [God's Word and Jesus' voice] are inseparably bound together." (Lenski, The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel, 753)

Whenever and wherever the Word of the Good Shepherd is proclaimed, the sheep hear the Shepherd's voice so they might follow where He leads.

God obviously knew what He was doing when He chose the imagery of sheep to describe mankind. Sheep are gullible and move with herd mentality. When one moves, the others tend to follow – even if moving in the wrong direction. Sheep are ***food oriented*** meaning they can be led from one place to another with a bucket of food. You and I often blindly follow others and are easily led astray by the food of the latest fads and desires of the world. You follow your hunger for instant gratification, your hunger to have your desires stimulated by wealth, popularity, desires of the flesh, and hunger to be your own god.

This corrupt and evil world is full of thieves, robbers, and wolves doing the bidding of the devil, scheming and conspiring to kill the sheep. The evil one wishes to draw you away from the Good Shepherd because apart from the Shepherd, you are lost and in danger of death. Once you are drawn out of earshot of the Good Shepherd's voice, the unbelieving world attempts to confuse you and replace the pure Word of the Shepherd with the false word of the world. In our first reading today, St Paul warns faithful sheep about this very thing saying that:

"... fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them." (Acts 20:29–30)

Wolves preach twisted things such as there is no God, or God is dead, or claim that in the end everyone goes to heaven and there is no **hell**. Others preach that there are many paths to heaven and Jesus is **only one** of the many ways. Cut-off from the voice and real presence of the Good Shepherd wolves and thieves waltz right into the pasture, separate the flock, single out the weak and lost, and eat their fill. Without the Good Shepherd, there is no future for the sheep other than death. This is why St Paul:

"... did not shrink from declaring [and teaching] ... anything that was profitable... testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." (Acts 20:20-21)

This is why it is so important to be here every week and hear God's Word proclaimed. It is important to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest Holy Scripture so that you focus on the tone, sound, and the personal uniqueness of the voice of the Good Shepherd. While fierce wolves and false shepherds come to do their worst, for all who know and follow the Shepherd's voice – **no thing – no one else – not even death** – can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (cf: Romans 8:38–39)

The only thing that can cut you off from eternal salvation is cutting yourself off from hearing and following the Shepherd's voice. That is, despising God's Word, denying yourself repentance, Word and Sacrament, so that you become secure in your sin. That was the problem in our Gospel text. Jesus' reputation as a great religious teacher and worker of amazing miracles had spread far and wide. Even while His Words and miracles gave overwhelming testimony that He is the Son of God, the Jews refused to hear His voice. He wasn't the god that they wanted. They were not among His sheep. (John 10:24-26) They had been seduced and deceived by the voice of the world, selfishness, and desire for power.

Whenever the Word of the Good Shepherd is proclaimed, the sheep hear the Shepherd's voice. God has placed His under-shepherds as His mouthpiece to you, His sheep, to proclaim His Word to you and all people living in this corrupted and deteriorating world. By faith in the Good Shepherd, you can take heart in the midst of your trials and tribulation, in Jesus' two-fold promise to all who hear His voice and follow Him.

- First, Jesus says: ***"I give them eternal life..."*** (John 10:28) In God's Word of Absolution, you are forgiven of all your sins, the sin of being a gullible sheep, your selfishness, and your transgression. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is life and salvation. In Baptism God washed your sin-stained robe and made it white in the blood of the Lamb.

(cf: Revelation 7:14) One day He will lead you out of this great tribulation on earth into the new heaven and new earth with Him. (cf: Revelation 21:1) For death in this life merely transfers your life from here on earth into eternity with our Triune God.

- Secondly, Jesus promises that His sheep: “...**will never perish...**” (John 10:28) The word perish here means “**to experience destruction.**” (BDAG, 115) To be separated from God and His love for all eternity. But His sheep will never perish because He has given them eternal life.

Jesus and the Father are One. (cf: John 10:30) One, not only in essence, but also in purpose. Jesus has been sent by the Father as the true Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep. The ultimate security of the sheep rests with the Good Shepherd and no one can snatch them out of His hand. (cf: John 10:28) All that Jesus says and does is merely the expression of the Father who is greater. No one can snatch the sheep out of the Father’s hand. (cf: John 10:29) And because Christ gives you eternal life and you will never perish, it simply follows that **no thing – no one else – not even death** – can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (cf: Romans 8:38–39)

When we think of the Good Shepherd, our minds conjure up sweet images of Jesus leading a fluffy flock of snow-white sheep while carrying a little lamb in His arms, or draped across His shoulder. It’s a comforting image – but – never forget the other image. The image of the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for His sheep, the sacrificial Lamb of God, nailed to the altar of the cross in your stead, shedding His blood for the forgiveness of all your sins and the sins of the whole world.

“18 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:18)

The Word of the Good Shepherd is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. (cf: Romans 1:16) You hear His voice in the Absolution and proclamation of His Word. You hear His voice in the remembrance of your Baptism where His Word is attached to water. You hear His voice in the eating and drinking of His body and blood where His Word is attached to bread and wine. As we prayed earlier in the Collect of the Day:

“Almighty God, merciful Father, since You have wakened from death the Shepherd of Your sheep, grant us Your Holy Spirit that when we hear the voice of our Shepherd we may know Him who calls us each by name and follow where He leads. Amen. (Collect of the Day, Fourth Sunday of Easter)

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.