

John 10:11–16
Misericordias Domini (Easter II)
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
April 14, 2024

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

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia! Today is often referred to as “Good Shepherd Sunday” because of all the Shepherd imagery. In the Old Testament Lesson from Ezekiel, God says: “Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out.” The Gospel text from John 10 is all about Jesus, the Good Shepherd. And the Epistle Lesson from 1 Peter says how we all, like sheep, have gone astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer, or Bishop, of our souls, Jesus Christ. Today is all about Jesus the Good Shepherd and you are the sheep of His pasture.

Certainly the most well known imagery of the Good Shepherd comes from Psalm 23, written by King David. Psalm 23 might be the one part of Scripture even the most nominal Christian or unbeliever would recognize because of its use in movies and at funerals. Even those who know nothing else of the Scriptures take comfort in Psalm 23. They hear it at a critical time in life and can’t help but be drawn by this moving poetry of the Scriptures. And then they associate Psalm 23 with their departed loved ones for years to come, often reminded of their loved ones by funeral cards with Psalm 23 printed on the reverse side. And in the Church, a number of our hymns are based directly on Psalm 23. That comes out especially today on Good Shepherd Sunday.

“The LORD is my Shepherd; I shall not want.” David was a young shepherd boy. Remember that Samuel went to the house of Jesse seeking the Lord’s anointed, the one to rule as

king over Israel in place of Saul. Samuel considered the seven oldest sons of Jesse, but the youngest, David, was keeping sheep. When they brought David before Samuel, the LORD said: “Arise, anoint him, for this is he” (1 Sam 16:12). Samuel anointed David with oil and the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David from that day forward. David was the anointed shepherd to rule as the shepherd of Israel. But in the meantime, he continued shepherding literal sheep until he was called into service in King Saul’s household (1 Sam 16:19).

And when the people of Israel fought against the Philistines, David would go back and forth, tending to his older brothers on the frontlines and tending the sheep back home. When the Philistine giant, Goliath, taunted Israel and blasphemed the Lord, the shepherd boy, David, used his shepherding skills to slay the giant. David said to Saul: “Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him . . . The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine” (1 Sam 17:37).

And after David became king, and fell into adultery and murder, it was only when the Prophet Nathan came and told the parable about the rich man with many flocks and herds and the poor man with nothing but one little ewe lamb that David recognized his sin. The poor man raised the little lamb and it grew up with him and with his children. It used to eat of his morsel and drink from his cup and lie in his arms, and it was like a daughter to him. A traveler came to the rich man, and rather than take one of his own flock, he took the poor man’s lamb and prepared it for the traveler. That was Nathan’s parable. King David’s anger was then kindled against the rich man, and David said: “As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die.” Nathan replies to King David: “You are the man” because David took another man’s wife

and had the man killed. The LORD worked through a parable about a lamb, so near and dear to David's heart, to lead David to repentance.

For King David, the shepherd from Bethlehem, sheep were always part of his life. So when he wrote Psalm 23, He was completely in character. King David knew sheep better than anyone, and He knew that the true Shepherd is the LORD Himself: David's son yet David's Lord, and our Lord too, Jesus Christ. David says: "The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want." With God leading us, there's nothing else we could possibly need. Whatever might come, we know that our Shepherd is there to provide for us, in good times and in bad. "He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters." He leads us to the Church and to His Word, to a place of sustenance and refreshment, to a place where we are cared for and given precisely what we need. In His green pastures and from His still waters He restores your soul. He leads you in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. In Holy Baptism, you are given the name of the Triune God. You are marked with His name as a lamb is marked by its shepherd.

And yet we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. If you pay attention, you'll see the shadows of death all around you. When you are confronted with death, you must realize how short your life is too. The shadow grows longer and the coldness deepens. You cannot flee the grip of death. But in this valley of the shadow of death, there's no need to fear. Your shepherd, the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, is with you. He went through death on the cross and overcame that death in His resurrection from the dead so that when you die in Him, you will rise again from the dead. There's no longer any need to fear death, because it will soon be gone, completely swallowed up by the life of Jesus Christ. The rod and staff of His Word will comfort you on the way.

King David continues: “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.” This is the Lord’s Supper, the green pasture to which the LORD is leading you. Upon this altar He prepares a table before you, a feast of His Body and Blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. The Lamb of God gives you Himself to eat and to drink. He provides you with everything you need here in the forgiveness of sins so that you can live boldly in this world, confronting every enemy that comes your way. He anoints your head with the oil of gladness, with the joy of salvation in the Holy Spirit. And He gives this all to you abundantly—without end. There’s no limit to the salvation He gives you right here.

With such promises, you can say with King David: “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.” That’s the Lord’s promise to you who belong to His flock. He is ever present with you with His goodness and mercy, for the rest of your life on this earth and in the age to come, when you will dwell in the house of the LORD for eternity. You are like the beloved lamb of the poor man. You are a lamb taken into the household of God and you have become His child. The Lord is raising you as His own, feeding you out of His hand, giving you to drink, and carrying you in His arms through thick and through thin. The LORD is your Shepherd. Jesus Christ is your Shepherd. And you are part of His flock. Of that you can be certain because He is the Good Shepherd, who laid down His life for you. He called you into His flock and He preserves you in the faith. In fact, He’s calling to you right now in His Word. Jesus says: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.” In Jesus Christ you can rest secure no matter what wolves and bears and robbers come, trying to snatch you away.

Our Good Shepherd also tells us today: “I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice.” There are more sheep out there, more who are called and chosen for eternal life. They just don’t realize it yet. There are sheep who have wandered away from the flock and the Good Shepherd is working through us to call them home. Today we welcome Brandon and Inga Shulz into the congregation, into this little sheep pen. Brandon was baptized and confirmed in the pure doctrine but wandered away. Now this lost sheep has returned to the fold, and he’s brought another lamb with him. There are many other lost sheep out there wandering around. There are sheep who haven’t yet heard the clear voice of the Shepherd. But Jesus continues calling to them to come to the pasture of God’s Word, to the pure, living waters untouched by false doctrine. Today we rejoice with the angels in heaven that Brandon and Inga will be joining us at the Lord’s table prepared for us in the presence of our enemies.

Finally Jesus says: “So there will be one flock, one shepherd.” In this life, we must be content with a little flock. That’s why Jesus says to us: “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom” (Luke 12:32). Fear not *little* flock. In this world we must be content with what seems small and insignificant in the world’s eyes. Yet the Word of God preached purely and the Sacraments administered according to Christ’s institution are powerful. And the Word of God is so effective, we can recognize the voice of the Good Shepherd in little flocks all over the place, even if the waters aren’t so clear. In this life, we must remain a little flock gathered around the pure preaching of God’s Word. But in eternal life, we will see the true unity of the Church—all believers from all times and places gathered together around the Lamb of God who died and rose again. Then we will dwell together, united in the one

flock and under the one Shepherd, the Good Shepherd, in the house of LORD forever. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! We stand for the Offertory.