

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

*“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want”* (Ps. 23:1), so sings the Psalmist, probably David. The rest of the psalm, too, is the psalmist’s confession of faith, a very personal one: *“He makes me lie down ... He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness ... Even though I walk ... I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”* And yet, throughout the millennia, readers of this psalm think of it as their own. Really, it belongs to the Church; it belongs to the saints. Its truth, that is, THE TRUTH expressed in this psalm, is as universal as the Church herself. And it is one — one, as the church herself is one. *“I believe in one, holy, Christian and apostolic Church,”* we confess.

Today, it is common for people to speak in a different way, talking about “my truth,” “your truth,” “his truth,” “her truth,” all of which may or may not be based in “the truth,” in reality. Although she said otherwise, in her interview a few weeks ago with Meghan Markle, Oprah didn’t seem really interested in the truth, but in Meghan’s story — for it’s always about the narrative. “They wanted to be able to tell their story and tell it in such a way that allowed them to be as truthful as possible,” Oprah said (Melissa Roberto, “Oprah Winfrey was ‘surprised’ Meghan Markle went ‘all the way there’ with racism claims against royal family,” FoxNews.com, April 24, 2021). And Oprah specifically asked Meghan for “her truth.” Indeed, Oprah did not spend any time seeking out sources that could confirm what Meghan said in a search for the truth; it was all about Meghan’s story, Meghan’s truth.

When the Psalmist writes, *“The LORD is my shepherd,”* however, he is not simply expressing his truth. He is writing for the Church, and he is affirming what Jesus proclaims in John chapter 10: *“I AM the Shepherd the Good One.”* ἐγὼ εἰμι — the Divine I AM, the name the Lord Himself gave to Moses on the mountain: *“Say this to the people of Israel: ‘I AM has sent me to you’”* (Ex. 3:14).

To be sure, last Sunday, those same words were recorded in Luke when Jesus presented Himself before the disciples, and I didn’t translate it the same way. I didn’t think the context warranted it; Dr. Weinrich thought it probably did; and Dr. Just translates it that way in his Commentary. I’m open to convincing.

But here in John, where Jesus makes a number of such I AM statements; notable, for example, at His arrest as the soldiers are looking for the one called Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus simply replied: *“I AM.”* And with that, the soldiers *“drew back and fell to the ground”* (Jn. 18:6). Why such a reaction, except that there was something extra in those simple words: “I AM” — I am the Lord.” Indeed, by this

statement, Jesus identifies Himself with the Lord whom the Psalmist praised in Psalm 23.

Jesus says, therefore, *“I am the Lord who is the Shepherd”* identified there. This shepherding Lord is found more than just in Psalm 23. The Men of Zion have been studying Zechariah, and the shepherd image is there: *“the LORD of hosts cares for his flock, the house of Judah”* (Zech. 10:3). Speaking of the coming of the Lord, Isaiah proclaims, *“He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young”* (Is. 40:11). Again, the Lord said, *“I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD”* (Ez. 34:12, 15).

But Jesus says more. He says that He is the Good One. The Good Shepherd is unique — not like others who want to claim the mantle of shepherd, but are pretenders, false shepherds, not really shepherds at all, but hired hands. The Good Shepherd is in a class by Himself. There is but one: *“there will be ... one shepherd.”*

He is unique for He is the only one who *“lays down his life for the sheep.”* Of course, there have been others who have made selfless sacrifices for neighbors, for the country: our military service men and women come to mind, or our police officers and firemen. But this Shepherd laid down His life not only for His own fold, but also for *“other sheep that are not of this fold,”* and all this so that He might gather His sheep into *“one flock”* under one banner, the banner of His cross.

Of course, this Shepherd is unique not just for His sacrifice unto death, but also because He also takes His life back up again. Such was the authority granted Him in His flesh by the Father: the authority and ability to die, and the authority and the power to take up His life again in resurrection victory.

And all this He did for you. St. Peter says it this way: *“Christ also suffered for you, ... He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. ... he was reviled, ... he suffered, ... He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls”* (1 Pet. 2:21-25).

We have returned to Him because we are listening to His voice and following after Him. But beware, for there are other voices seeking to draw you away from Jesus, *“men speaking twisted things,”* St. Paul said. He called them *“fierce wolves”* that, as Jesus says, snatch the sheep and scatter them. And they don't have to look fierce to be dangerous. Oprah doesn't look dangerous, but she did flatly

contradict what the Bible teaches about salvation when she infamously said, “There couldn’t possibly be just one way [of salvation].” But Jesus says, “*No one comes to the Father except through me*” (Jn. 14:6). The sheep listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd and follow Him. Peter, too, proclaimed today that “*there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*”

More recently, I was talking to someone about Christians who are being wooed away from Christ and His good news back to trying to gain a holiness based upon the law — keeping Old Testament laws concerning food and clothing and the observance of the Sabbath. It made me think of St. Paul’s warning to the saints in Galatia who were being told that they needed to keep the law of circumcision in order to be saved. Paul chided them: “*I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel — not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed*” (Gal. 1:6-9).

Dear saints of God, the Good Shepherd did not come among us to weigh us down with the law or to give us a false hope of salvation by the works of the law. As Peter proclaimed at the Jerusalem Council, “*neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear [this yoke]*” (Acts 15:10). Rather, Jesus came as our one Lord, our Shepherd, the one and only Good Shepherd, who came to lay down His life for us to bear away our sins. He came to take His life back again to open our way back to the Father, to lead us as a Shepherd through the valley of the shadow of death to the Father’s house, and to the banquet table He has prepared for us.

And our Good Shepherd is leading us even now and supplying all that we need for this body and life — we shall not want. He gives us green pastures and still waters; He accounts us righteous by faith and leads us in the way of righteousness; He feeds us from this table now as a foretaste of the heavenly banquet; He fills our cups to overflowing, so Good is our Shepherd.

That’s not just my truth, or your truth, but that is the truth spoken by Truth Himself, the one Lord Jesus Christ, the one Shepherd, the only Way to the Father. Help us, Lord, to listen to Jesus’ voice and so walk in the way of truth (2 Pet. 2:2).

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Christ is risen! Alleluia!