

Christ is risen! Alleluia!

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

This Sunday has come to be known as Good Shepherd Sunday for obvious reasons. The older name of the Sunday that heard of the comfort of the Good Shepherd was called *Misericordias Domini*, speaking of the mercy of the Lord. As we have moved to the three-year lectionary, we consider various parts of John chapter 10, which means we don't actually hear Jesus refer to Himself as the Good Shepherd in today's Gospel. We did sing it in the Introit.

Nevertheless, we know our comfort and hope now and unto eternity is truly found in Him who came as the Good Shepherd—Jesus, the Son of God, but who is, as we heard, in essence, One with the Father. He is the One sent from the Father to lay down His life for us sheep who love to wander.

He is, as was revealed to St. John, both Lamb and Shepherd. As a Lamb, He was without blemish, oppressed and afflicted, and led silently to the slaughter. As a Lamb He bore the iniquity of us all, and was crushed for them. As a Lamb He poured out His lifeblood as a ransom price for us — He takes away the sins of the world. But death could not hold this Lamb-Shepherd — He would take up His life again, so that, ever the Lamb slain, He is now also the Lamb who lives and reigns — there's the Easter theme — and He is the Lamb-Shepherd who lives to “*guide [us] to springs of living water;*” and to “*wipe away every tear from [our] eyes.*”

He is also the Shepherd who knows His sheep and is known by them. He knows us for He has clothed us with His own righteousness in Holy Baptism. He has clothed us with robes washed in baptism's water, water turned ruddy from the blood that flowed from His wounds, yet water that turns robes white, spotless and without blemish before Him. He even calls us by name, as we prayed in the Collect, and as the children's hymn also reminds us, “I am Jesus' little lamb. Ever glad at heart I am, for my shepherd gently guides me, knows my need and well provides me, loves me everyday the same, even calls me by my name” (LSB740).

The Shepherd knows His sheep and the sheep know Him; they know His voice; they listen for His voice; they follow after His voice. Beware the cacophony of voices that seek to equate their voices with that of the Good Shepherd, to divert your attention from Him, to draw His disciples away from Him. Beware! They are fierce wolves speaking twisted things, seeking to draw you away from your Shepherd. Or they are the voices of hired hands who flee when the wolf comes seeking to snatch and scatter the flock. “*My sheep hear my voice,*” Jesus says on the one hand, “*and I know them, and they follow me*” (John 10:27). On the other hand, Jesus says, “*Beware of false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves*” (Matt. 7:15).

But even though the wolves are out there, seeking to snatch and scatter us, Jesus gives us a great promise, that when we listen to His voice, He says, “*I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand*” (John 10:28). Now that’s a Good Shepherd, and greater yet, “*No one is able to snatch [His lambs] out of the Father’s hand*” (John 10:29). What wonderful hope and comfort.

These sureties are not found in man. We look around and lament. It seems that our society is broken; our politics are broken; our marriages are broken; our families are broken; our relationships are broken; our peace is broken. But what is broken is not necessarily lost, for Christ Himself, the stone the builders rejected (Ps. 118:22), came first to break — in contrition and repentance — and then to put back together. Indeed, He does not despise “*a broken and contrite heart*” (Ps. 51:17). And so the Lord tears us, that He may heal us; He strikes us down, that He may bind us up (Hosea 6:1).

And He sends forth pastors as undershepherds to speak with His voice, that they might apply this healing to us, that Jesus might come and bind us up. As Jesus told His apostles: “*He who hears you, hears Me*” (Luke 10:16). Pastors speak with Jesus’ voice as they “*testify to the gospel of the grace of God*” (Acts 20:24) in Jesus, the Good Shepherd, as they proclaim His kingdom, as they declare “*to you the whole counsel of God*” (Acts 20:27), as they keep watch over the flock the Holy Spirit has set them apart as overseers, as they baptize and teach and feed with the Body and Blood of Jesus, as they serve, and warn, and protect.

Dear sheep of the Shepherd’s flock, it’s important to recognize the Good Shepherd’s voice, listen to it, and follow Him. Listen therefore to Him who laid down His life for you; listen to Him who took it back up again in resurrection victory. Receive your hope and comfort in Him alone, and follow His voice unto eternal life

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

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