**John 10:11-18**

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. **12** He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. **13** He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. **14**  I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, **15**  just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. **16** And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. **17**  For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. **18**  No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

**“Only One Good Shepherd”**

 Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. Since there are seven weeks of Easter, the fourth Sunday tells us that we are at the middle of the Easter Season. Right in the middle of celebrating the glorious resurrection of Jesus and waiting for His soon to be ascension into a heaven, a comforting picture stands out. Jesus is the good shepherd. The shepherd and sheep theme is as ancient as you can get with Christianity. We also find it widespread throughout both Old and New Testament Scripture.

 For example, David was a shepherd before God called him as king to care for His people Israel. One of the greatest Psalms written by David shows the humility of this king. He starts right off by stating, “The Lord’s my shepherd.” Likewise, Peter after being forgiven was sent out as a shepherd with Jesus saying, “Feed my sheep.” Peter told future pastors to have the same care for their churches saying, “…shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you…” (1 Peter 5:2).

 The greatest place where the shepherd theme comes out with Jesus is in John 10. Strangely enough, these comforting words of the Gospel are at the same time spoken within a not so comforting circumstance. Jesus speaks about six months before His crucifixion. What he says is before the Pharisees and other Jews a powder keg waiting to go off. He pierces through the darkness out of love and uncovers what men hide to share the truth. Unlike false shepherds, Jesus the good shepherd has proven His death and life is for the sheep.

 Jesus describes a desperate situation that cries out for salvation. The sheep is an animal last on our list. Yet, those who believe in Him Jesus sees as sheep. You could say, “By baptism, He makes us sheep.” This is opposite in the way the world operates. What school mascot lifts up the sheep? Even the St. Louis “Rams” need to sound tough and so there is no mentioning of that name, “sheep.” Yet, that is what we are in Christ. St. Paul the mighty apostles makes it clear, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered” (Romans 8:36).

 Of course, sheep are vulnerable in many ways while the wolf has only one objective. It is to kill and devour. Unlike the need to herd, wolves naturally hunt. The alpha among this pack is the Devil, but plenty serve his purpose. Certainly, those in authority suppress and persecute. Addictions and pleasures can consume the sheep. As well as, enticing cults and spiritualties seek to snuff out faith in the Gospel. St. Paul even warns, “I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things…”(Acts 20:29-30).

 Logically to offset this imbalance between sheep and wolves is to have a shepherd. Unfortunately, Jesus mentions first the hireling who plays it safe and takes no risk. They can look good for a time, but at the sight of a threat things change. There is no hiding their true colors. To see the wolf means only to think of self. Jesus spoke this against Israel’s leaders the Pharisees and Sadducees. They pretended to care, but were in it for worldly gain and glory. Jesus makes this judgment call for the sake of the sheep. All church leaders, especially pastor, have the warning from God, “Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!” (23:1)

 Jesus proves Himself the good shepherd that saves. First, He chose to hold the title of shepherd. We did not choose to be sheep, by Christ made us that by baptism. However, being sheep comes from the better fact that Jesus has chosen to be our good shepherd. He created this bond of love saying, “I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father…” When doubts over this bond of love rises up from sin. Take heart that nothing can break how Jesus has laid down His life for you. His care toward the sheep is personal so much so in pastors you hear Him say, “I forgive you.”

 Jesus more than seeks to bind up the broken hearted. He fights with one objective in mind. It is to silence the wolf, but it seems foolish. The shepherd dies for the sheep. Rather than kill the wolf, Jesus alone removes what makes the wolf so threatening: death. As an early church father writes, “Jesus did this that, by a new arrangement, he might, although captured himself, capture the devil, the author of death… that, by dying for his sheep, he might open the way for them to conquer death” (ACC). The sacrifice by God’s Son lets none be snatched or scattered. To receive this good shepherd at the Lord’s Supper means struggling sheep survive in Him, blemished sheep are whole by Him, and slain sheep will live with Him.

 Jesus protect His sheep by what He says. He speaks for any to listen to Him. The safeguard against hirelings and false shepherds is His Word. The church appears scattered by many an antichrist and false doctrine. Yet, Luther says it well, “Thank God, a seven-year-old child knows what the church is, namely, holy believers and sheep who hear the voice of their Shepherd” (SA Article XII). Unwilling sheep not listening to this good shepherd only fall prey to the wolf. It means preaching cannot be about my self-interest, but to hear God speak His Law and Gospel. It means forgiveness is not an empty word, but to hear Jesus remove my sin. It means teaching is not an option, but for me to know true doctrine verses the Devil’s lies. The safeguard for the sheep is for faithful pastors to deliver Jesus’ Word.

 Jesus has rescued us from death, given abundant life by forgiveness, and remains to be the great shepherd of His Church. His sacrifice is good for each sheep and even now goes about shaping the whole flock. St. John says, “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.” The comfort we have as a sheep is for others to have the same kind of good shepherd. It cannot be by force, manipulation, or some incentive, but love that believes Jesus who says others “will listen to my voice.” Unlike false shepherds, Jesus the good shepherd has proven His death and life is for the sheep. Since this shepherd remains, the sheep can rest as they listen to Him. Amen. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia! Amen.