

Sermon for The Third Sunday of Easter
Luther Memorial Chapel, Shorewood, Wisconsin
Pastor Michael Larson
4/26/2020



Readings: Ezekiel 37:1–14; 1 John 5:4–10; John 20:19–31

O God, through the humiliation of Your Son You raised up the fallen world. Grant to Your faithful people, rescued from the peril of everlasting death, perpetual gladness and eternal joys; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

This day in the church year is called “Good Shepherd Sunday.” It’s a day in which we joyfully confess that Jesus is our Good Shepherd. We also joyfully acknowledge that we are His own sheep, purchased and won with His own blood, baptized, and led by Him into His Kingdom of mercy and grace. Jesus, our Good Shepherd, saved us by laying down His life for us on the cross and taking it up again in the resurrection. Now, ascended into heaven, and seated at the right hand of God, He reigns for us as our own High Priest, and has secured for us forgiveness,

life, and salvation. Being joined to Him in Holy Baptism, we are awaiting His glorious return, the consummation of all things, and the resurrection of these bodies to life everlasting.

Now even though we eagerly look forward to all these things, and the glorious promises of God breaking forth into our lives, we've got to face the reality down here on the ground. Because the truth is, the sheep and lambs these days are fearful, frustrated and worried! No denying that! If they haven't lost their jobs, they have loved ones who have. Others, who are somewhere on the spectrum of mental illness, have had anxiety or paranoia, spike to new and frightening heights. The children quarantined at home are right to feel some injustice here. It hurts to be deprived of their own playmates, for play is a sacred thing! The pastors I've talked to too are struggling. Our Lord wept for the sheep without a shepherd but the shepherds without their sheep is also a sad state of affairs. Besides this, there's guilt over not doing enough, or comparing one's self to others, and falling short! Besides this, with all the social media these days, folks see other families flourishing during lockdown, and themselves as floundering!

With all these new trials this is a good day to refresh yourself in the 23rd Psalm. It's amazing how this psalm has comforted so many saints in ages past through so many crosses and afflictions. It's a psalm all about a Shepherd and His sheep and the care that that shepherd provides. In a 21st century context, even being disconnected from daily experience with shepherds and sheep, and that whole Middle Easter culture, this image of the Good Shepherd continues to resonate so powerfully with us all, providing comfort and consolation. The 23rd Psalm teaches us about God's tender care and mercy. We are reminded of our utter dependency upon God for all things.

David prayed, "The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want." That "shall not want" part, which often throws people off, just means that with this Good Shepherd all your needs are met! King David goes on "He (the

Good Shepherd) makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me besides still waters. He restores my soul.”

That all sounds good doesn't it? To be protected, fed, and provided for? With this pandemic, let's face it, things have felt a bit up in the air these days. When it all started the fear was palpable and that fear still lingers on. But David prays the following, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou (the Lord, my Shepherd!) He is with me!” Not a bad prayer to pray while wearing a mask walking down the grocery aisle!

As troubling and difficult as this little exile is for us, it probably still pales in comparison with Ezekiel, who provided our first reading this morning. Ezekiel's' sadness at the death of his wife was to match the grief of the people at the destruction of Jerusalem. He was hauled off to captivity in Babylon where he prophesied to fellow exiles who lived by the River Chebar at Tel Abib. Even though Ezekiel had plenty to mourn about he didn't preach a message of doom and gloom, even with all the uncertainty and sadness. Ezekiel, who knew suffering well, paints a beautiful picture this morning of the future age in which God would rule and shepherd His people, “For thus says the Lord: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when He is among His sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on the a day of clouds and thick darkness. I will bring them into their own land. I will feed them on the mountains of Israel...I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep...I will seek the lost and I will bring back the strayed.”

That's about us! Every last one of us. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way. That why our hearts this morning should leap when we hear Jesus say, “I am the Good Shepherd.” Notice how He doesn't say *a good shepherd*, but *The Good*

Shepherd, the very one Ezekiel had proclaimed so clearly nearly 600 years earlier.

Jesus said “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” You see, on the cross Christ bore in His body the attacks of the predators of sin and death and the devil for you that you might be rescued. All of our sufferings pale in comparison with the suffering of Christ, our shepherd King. Our epistle says that “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.”

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who seeks out His scattered sheep to deliver them. He gathers them and feeds them in rich pasture. He binds up the broken and strengthens the sick. He lays down His life for wandering and wayward sheep. He calls us home to the Father.

Folks, these days are no time to give into faithless fears and needless despair. Jesus said, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." Stop living your life as if you had no shepherd at all! This “Good Shepherd Sunday” is a day to open your ears and listen closely to Him who loves you – who brings words of healing and refreshment. Martin Luther put it so simply when he wrote in the Smalcald Articles “Thank God, today, that a seven year old child knows what the Church is, namely, the holy believers and lambs who listen to the voice of their shepherd.” Draw close to Him in those words of absolution that refresh. Feed on the pasture of His Word. Delight yourself in the rich treasures of salvation. May this Good Shepherd guide you through every step of your life, both in life, and in death, that you would cheerfully follow wherever He leads! For you too were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Prayer of the Church

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

For all who have been baptized at the still waters of the font, that they would remain in the green pastures of the Holy Church, where they want for nothing and have their souls restored as their Good Shepherd ever cares for their every spiritual need, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For all pastors in Christ, especially Matthew, our Synod president; John, our district president; and Michael, our circuit visitor, that through their preaching and teaching we would be led in the paths of righteousness for the sake of Christ's name, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the members of this parish and all Christians everywhere, that we would receive strength to resist sin and temptation in our lives, fearing no evil as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, knowing that our Good Shepherd is with us to heal and comfort us, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For steadfast faith in Jesus Christ, a cheerful hope in His mercy, and a sincere love for God and neighbor, which disease and distance can never destroy, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those whom God has placed in authority over us, especially Donald, our president; Tony, our governor; and all who make, administer and judge our laws, that they would be protected and work prudently in their response to the pandemic, serve with integrity and honor in all tasks, and seek the common good of all, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the sick and suffering, for the lonely and unemployed, and for all who have requested our prayers, that they would be well cared for and restored to health, and given grace to accept their time of tribulation with

courage and hope, knowing that they always remain in their Good Shepherd's loving arms, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those who come to the table their Lord and Shepherd has prepared for them, that they would receive the Holy Sacrament of His true body and blood in faith, and to the eternal nourishment of their souls, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those who by illness or precaution are kept from the table, that they may trust in the voice of their Good Shepherd and enjoy soon the pasture of Christ's Sacrament together with the rest of His sheep, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For goodness and mercy to follow us all the days of our lives, that we would, together with the saints who have gone before us, dwell in the house of the Lord forever, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy; through Your Son, Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for us, and who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Hymn of the Day: The King of Love My Shepherd Is LSB 709



1 The King of love my shep - herd is, Whose good - ness
 2 Where streams of liv - ing wa - ter flow, My ran - somed
 3 Per - verse and fool - ish oft I strayed, But yet in
 4 In death's dark vale I fear no ill With Thee, dear



fail - eth nev - er; I noth - ing lack if
 soul He lead - eth And, where the ver - dant
 love He sought me And on His shoul - der
 Lord, be - side me, Thy rod and staff my



I am His And He is mine for - ev - er.
 pas - tures grow, With food ce - les - tial feed - eth.
 gent - ly laid And home re - joic - ing brought me.
 com - fort still, Thy cross be - fore to guide me.

5 Thou spreadst a table in my sight;
 Thine unction grace bestoweth;
 And, oh, what transport of delight
 From Thy pure chalice floweth!

6 And so through all the length of days
 Thy goodness faileth never;
 Good Shepherd, may I sing Thy praise
 Within Thy house forever!

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