

Rev. Danny Mackey
Third Sunday of Easter
April 15, 2018
John 10:11-16
Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Muncie, Ind.

He is risen! [He is risen indeed!] Alleluia!

“There will be one flock, one shepherd.”

Apostle John preached his Gospel to the Jews. They were his family, his race, his people. Jesus came to His own, but His own did not receive Him. But that didn't mean Jesus rejected them, stopped calling to them, gave up on them. No, His beloved disciple John continued to preach to the Jews in order that some more would be saved. And many were. Many more came to the faith, believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and by believing now have life in His name.

Converting to the Christian faith wasn't easy for the Jews. Not at all. For nearly 1,500 years, the Jews saw the world as two flocks. One flock consisted of the great crowd of Gentiles, people without knowledge of salvation, without promise, and without hope. In short, they were without God. Making up the other flock were the families of the patriarchs and, eventually, the people of Israel. These are the people God chose, to whom He revealed Himself, with whom He made a covenant of grace, to whom He sent the prophets, and to whom He gave His Word and its promise of a Messiah—a Savior and Redeemer from sin, death, and hell. And God told His flock not to mix with the other.

Marriage between a Jew and a foreigner was verboten. Entering into the house of a Gentile and eating with one was also forbidden. The type of business one could conduct was limited even. God had set His flock apart—marked them as holy—from all other peoples and nations. They were given all manner of ceremonial laws, including what they could eat, what they could wear, what they could do, and also how they could cut their hair and trim their beards—all to distinguish them from the Gentiles. The wall separating these two flocks, then, was great and high.

So when the followers of Jesus of Nazareth begin to welcome in Romans and Greeks and Ethiopians, the Jews are taken aback. They don't know what to make of it. The Messiah doesn't just belong to the Jews, as many had thought it would be. The Messiah would be the Savior of the nations—the Savior of both Jew and Gentile alike.

God revealed by the mouths of His holy prophets, long before the time of Christ, that this wall of separation would not stand forever. In Christ's time, the wall would fall and the Gentiles would have a share in the promised salvation. Then there would be one flock and one Shepherd. The words of the prophets were confirmed by these words of Christ: "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." With these words, Jesus announces that He is the Good Shepherd whom the prophets promised. He also says that the entire world of sinners constitutes the flock He wants to tend. Therefore, "I have other sheep that are not of this fold" are not the people of Israel, but rather poor, erring Gentiles.

Until Jesus came, the Gentiles stood outside the chosen community of Israel and the testaments of the promises were foreign to them. He intended to open the barriers that had separated them from the people of God. "And they will listen to My voice," He continues. The Word would be preached to these Gentiles, and they would receive it in faith. And the Gentiles who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

With this, the previous distinction between Jews and Gentiles would cease. Christ, with these words, declares that He was building one Church that was no longer bound to any particular people, land, or law. The whole earth would be His Church, and the heavens would be its vault. The gates of this Church would be open everywhere, and through Baptism, all peoples would enter it as one people. Apostle John beholds this Church in his great revelation: a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before God's throne and the Lamb, clothed in their white baptismal gowns, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

Christ has gathered people from every tribe and people and language into His one true Church of Christ on earth. As even a seven-year-old knows, the Church is simply the holy believers and lambs who hear the voice of their shepherd. This we confess—and must hold fast to—when we declare, "I believe in one holy Christian Church." Our being part of Christ's flock has everything then to do with belief in His Word.

But it's not uncommon—rather, it's quite common—for people claim that there are many true churches, each of which has a different form or part of the truth. Many maintain that the Christian religion is not the only saving faith. In fact, they claim that nothing really depends on faith. “We’re all taking different paths to the same place.” “It’s not about what we believe,” they say, “but about what we do.” Also, “If a person acts according to his or her conscience, if he or she loves other people and treats everyone fairly, then that person will eventually make his or her way to God and be saved.” On the surface, it’s a pretty nice idea. But when you examine it a little closer, you realize that God’s Word is just a sham and you can’t trust any of its promises—including angels and heaven and an afterlife—and also that you don’t really treat people with love and fairness—at least, not nearly often enough to be considered a good person. It’s a broad path and many are on it, but it doesn’t lead to heaven. You can hear this from many so-called Christian preachers who misuse Bible verses to explain away such dreadful indifference to religion.

All of these pernicious teachings undermine and overturn religion and godliness, and they are judged and rejected by the words of Christ: “There will be one flock, one shepherd.” Christ has one flock, and He is the only true Shepherd of peoples’ souls. Therefore, if a person doesn’t belong to this flock and to this Shepherd, there’s no second flock in which his or her soul can find pasture. Like a lost lamb, his or her soul restlessly wanders without water in the desert of this world, and it finally dies, left as carrion for the scavengers. A person who has not come to the communion of the Church is not on the path to heaven; instead, that person is without God and without hope.

The true Church is bound to nothing except Christ and His holy Word, and since that Word has already sounded to the ends of the earth, His flock is to be found everywhere. The Church has no physical borders. Like its Head, it is not of this world, even though it is in the world.

While many falsely enlarge the Church of Christ, many others, on the contrary, falsely want to limit it. They restrict the Church to a visible institution. Roman Catholic teaching binds the Church and salvation to Rome and the Pope. All who don’t subject themselves to his supreme power and the authority of the bishops appointed by him are anathema—that is, they are condemned to an eternity in hell. The sectarians, on the other hand, bind the Church and salvation to their sect and its work and rituals, condemning all who don’t want

to prescribe precisely to what their sect believes. We're talking about the vast majority of Protestantism here, folks. And we're also talking about these church bodies' official teachings.

All of these limitations seek to separate people anew. They cast to the ground these words of Christ: "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."

The Church is of both Jew and Gentile, united by the voice of God in Christ Jesus. Only one thing is necessary to belong to the one flock that saves. Hearing the voice of the Good Shepherd and Overseer of our souls and believing it. A person must listen to the voice of Christ and recognize Him as the only Shepherd of his or her soul. And this, too, is a gift, as we confess in our Small Catechism: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel." Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ.

"So there will be one flock, one shepherd." You have been drawn by Christ's voice into His flock, the Church. Jesus, as your Good Shepherd, has tended you, washing you and feeding you, constantly providing you all your needs. And He calls still to others, just as Apostle John preached his Gospel to the Jews, in order that some more would be saved. Wherever His Word, written by the prophets and apostles, is read and preached, it still calls, invites, and gathers His flock. Likewise, whenever we speak Christ's Word, it's His voice that they hear.

It is Christ's most gracious will that His call as Shepherd resound always more loudly in the wilderness of this world, where unnumbered multitudes of miserable heathens continue to wander without God and without hope. By the sharing of the Gospel, more and more people will be led to the green pastures of Christ's Church. And as His holy flock becomes more unified in Him, the walls Satan and his servants set up to separate believers will continue to be broken down.

In Jesus' name.

He is risen! [He is risen indeed!] Alleluia!