

Rev. Danny Mackey  
Easter 3  
May 5, 2019  
John 10:11-16; 1 Peter 2:21-25  
Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Muncie, Ind.

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

*"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep."*

On the tenth anniversary of my Ordination, you gave me a shepherd's crook, a long and sturdy staff with a curved hook on one end. The shepherd's crook, also sometimes referred to as a crosier, is a symbol of the pastoral Office. So, it was quite fitting to receive such a fine gift. I see it every time I enter my study. Sometimes people pick it up and ask me about it. That happened last week.

I was delighted to talk about the shepherd's crook. Immediately I recalled a Bible study in Norman, Oklahoma, where I had done my vicarage—but this was years later, after I had begun my work in the Ministry. My supervisor, Pastor Dave Nehrenz—who holds a special place in my heart, as all vicarage supervisors ought to—take note, Vicar—Pastor Nehrenz explained it in a very simple way. He's kinda brilliant like that. He said that the shepherd's crook is used in three ways.

First, it's a walking staff, to help the shepherd to walk over rough ground, so that he might keep his footing.

Second, it's got a curved hook so that the shepherd can bring the sheep back into the fold. A shepherd would take the hook and place it around the sheep's shoulders, the lower neck, and gently but firmly draw the wayward-going sheep back into the herd.

Third, it's used to hit things. In particular, it's used to hit those things that threaten the sheep, like wolves and other predators.

He summed it up: the shepherd's crook is used to walk, to bring back, and to hit.

As Lutherans, we've fully embraced this image of the shepherd. We Call men to be "pastors." I was told that the Biblical term pastor was popularized by Lutherans. Baptists have historically called their ministers "brothers," emphasizing that we are all children of God through Christ and eschewing the idea of clergy. Roman Catholics have called their ministers "priests," emphasizing the sacrificial nature of the ministry, and even more so "fathers," pointing out the spiritual guidance offered by them. Lutherans, especially Missouri Synod Lutherans, have emphasized "pastor" because of the idea that their

ministers are supposed to feed God's flock with the Word, that is, with preaching and teaching and the Sacrament of the Altar. The word pastor means "to feed, to tend, to guard, and to protect," just as Jesus commands Peter in John 21, "Feed My lambs... tend My sheep... feed My sheep."

The pastoral Office is a high and holy Office. Christ Himself established it among His apostles. All pastors follow in the apostles' train. This is one of the things we confess when we say we "believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church." In our Epistle lesson, St. Peter writes that it is Christ who is the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls. Later, in the same letter, Peter says that Christ is the Chief Shepherd and that the elders, that is, the pastors, are undershepherds. Just as the apostles were given to preach and teach only that which Christ had given to them, so too pastors today are to only do the same. This is also what we confess with our belief in the "apostolic Church."

As undershepherds, pastors have a great and difficult Office. It's great because of what the Ministry is to accomplish, namely, the salvation of souls—the salvation of your soul. This is accomplished only through Word and Spirit. Pastors are given to preach that Word, by which the Holy Spirit works to create and to preserve faith in Christ. This Office is difficult because pastors are unfit to fulfill such an Office. No pastor is high or holy. Just ask any wife of any pastor. Only God is high—the highest. Only God is holy—the holiest. But God, in His wisdom (which looks often like foolishness to us and to the world), has chosen to use sinful men, raised up from His sheep, to serve as pastors to the rest of the sheep.

So, as a result, pastors need those things which a shepherd's crook symbolize. Remember, first, a shepherd's crook is a walking staff. It helps the shepherd walk over rough ground, so that he might keep his footing. The Office of pastor actually helps keep a sinful man from sin. It doesn't mean that he won't be tempted—in fact, the devil may attack him even more fiercely. Rather, a pastor will be reminded by his position—whether that be by the shirt and collar he's wearing, the diploma of vocation on his wall, the mutual consolation of his fellow pastors, the encouragements and needs of the people he's given to serve, or the very Word of God spoken and evoked by all of these—a pastor will be reminded what he's to be about and sin is not one of them. Unfortunately, that doesn't mean that a pastor can't lay down the shepherd's crook and try to walk on his own. Yet, if he holds firmly to his Call—and that means God's Word to him and to the people he's given

to serve—a pastor will be strengthened and bolstered, made able to stand and to stand firm. As a symbol then, the shepherd’s crook indicates mercy toward the man filling the Office. And the Office itself is a grace to the people. Pastors are God’s gifts to you so that you may receive His gifts.

Second, remember that a shepherd’s crook has a curved hook on one end. St. Peter tells pastors to be gentle yet firm. The curved hook symbolizes the firmness of the pastoral Office. Firmness is required because we are all like sheep who’ve gone astray. When we wander off into sin, we need to be carefully and firmly pulled back into the fold of the Church—so that there will be one flock and one Shepherd, even Jesus Christ, our Lord. All manner of shiny and attractive things seeks to draw us from the Church. They might be things that appeal and advertise to our base nature—sex, violence, intoxication, pride, greed. The world does such a fine job of advertising such things that they make these sins sound noble and virtuous. The devil is clever, the craftiest of all God’s creatures—much smarter than sheep, which are some of the dumbest. Even Eve and Adam in their perfection were tempted and fell for the devil’s lies. Apart from God and His people, we don’t stand a chance.

As a result, pastors, as commanded by God’s Word, are to help guide the sheep away from sin and back into the fold. They do it with the Word—properly distinguishing Law and Gospel—recognizing God-given barriers and pointing out the good stuff. It’s like a shepherd bringing his little flock to a green, lush pasture and building a little pen. The shepherd gives his sheep to eat of the healthy and verdant grasses within the pen. Yet the sheep see the grass, which looks just as green and tasty, outside the pen. The pastor’s sure about the grass inside the pen, so he gives the sheep to eat of that grass. The shepherd here is not the pastor; rather, He is the Good Shepherd. Jesus builds the sheep pen, of which He Himself is the gate. Pastors, as His undershepherds, simply work within the pen and seek to bring wayward sheep back into the pen. It is Christ’s Word that they use, not their own. And it is Christ’s Word that alone does the work. And with the Word, the hook of the shepherd’s crook is placed around a sheep’s shoulders and gently but firmly draws the wayward-going sheep back into the herd.

As we mentioned, there are those who wish to attack and consume the sheep. “The devil,” says St. Peter, “is like a prowling lion, looking for someone to devour.” So the

shepherd's crook is used to protect the sheep, that is, to hit those things that threaten the sheep, like wolves and other predators. Consider King David, who was a shepherd before he was anointed king. David defeated Goliath, the Giant of Gath, because of the skills he learned protecting his sheepfold. He faced lions and bears, we're told. With staff and rod, David protected his sheep. With sling and stone, David protected Israel.

So, too, are pastors to protect God's sheep. A big difference, however, is that we recognize that it's not against flesh and blood that we wrestle, but against the dark powers and principalities of this world. Thus, a pastor attacks stuff like false doctrine and sin and false teachers, to whom John refers as antichrists. Those who protect us in our bodies, we are also to be grateful for. In fact, I thank each of you who carries a firearm in church on Sunday and whenever we gather. You do so to protect us in our bodies while I have the privilege of caring for you in your souls.

It might seem harsh when a pastor attacks false doctrine and sin and false teachers. It's definitely not politically correct. Yet you need such protection. Don't give into the siren's call of complacency and subjectivism. Our Good Shepherd declared, "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life, no one comes to the Father but by Me." He is the only Way. He alone is the Truth. Only He grants and sustains Life. To be apart from Him is to be Lost, to only know the Lie, to be Dead.

The world desires that you be lost like it is with foolish and innocuous sayings like "Not all who wander are lost." Yes, yes, they are lost.

The devil cannot stand the Truth, so he continues to propagate the Lie. He wraps it up in intellectualism and objectivity and tolerance to make it palatable. But it's poison. Just because one can't taste the poison when it goes down doesn't mean that person isn't poisoned. The devil is miserable, and he wants you to be miserable too.

Death, everlasting death, is the consequence of sin. Death means being apart, separated from the One who is Life. Death is not oblivion, but rather the absence of Life, which is torment and pain. When your bones ache or you suffer distress or anxiety, sickness and failure, you're experiencing death. Life alone grants relief, satisfies.

From these things the Good Shepherd and His pastors seek to protect you.

Whether our Lord Jesus ever used a shepherd's crook, we don't know. The Scriptures don't say. Yet, all the things symbolized by it He most certainly did and continues to do.

Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, walked according to the Law, fulfilling all of the Father's commandments. He resisted the temptations of the devil, firmly relying on the Scriptures. When He was faced with stumbling, He submitted His will to the will of the Father. He was like us in every way, says the author of Hebrews, yet He was without sin.

Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, came to seek and to save the lost. He preached and taught that we have gone astray and that we need to be drawn back to the Father. He declares, "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life," offering those very blessings. He came to His own people, to Israel, to draw them back. He came to save all the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, as savior of the nations, calling both Jew and Gentile alike. He has called you out of darkness and into His marvelous light. He did it by being raised up on a cross for all the world to see, and by being raised from the dead so that we might believe in Him and have new life in His name.

Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, has struck our enemies, wounding them mortally, and assuring their defeat. While the devil rages, because he knows that his time is short, we are promised that he has been defeated on the cross and from the tomb. The devil struck Christ's heel, but Christ has crushed the devil's head! Jesus lives! The victory is won!

The world may continue to deny Jesus, to resist His invitation, and to persecute His people. Yet, on the latter day, when Christ stands upon the earth, all will behold Him in His glory. He will be vindicated before the world. More importantly, Jesus stands vindicated before the Father now—and we stand in Him, both people and pastors, both sheep and undershepherds alike.

Sin has been struck, nailed to the cross. He who knew no sin became sin and was crucified for us. Death has been swallowed up in death—in the death of Jesus—and so He can no longer die. Same with us, who have died with Christ in Holy Baptism. Sin and death have been defeated on the cross and in the resurrection of our Lord. Jesus distributes the spoils of that victory to His people, through His servants, so that they might be blessed, blessed superabundantly, blessed everlastingly.

In Jesus' name.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus + to life everlasting.