

Vicar Gabriel Aiello

Third Sunday of Easter (Misericordias Domini)

May 1st, 2022

John 10:11-16

Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Muncie, IN

Good Shepherd.

In Jesus' name,

This Sunday is known as Good Shepherd Sunday, because in our reading from John, we learn of how our Lord Jesus, who is the Good Shepherd, shows tender mercy to His sheep, even giving up His life for them.

Jesus tells us what the Good Shepherd is not. The Good Shepherd is not a hired hand. A hired hand "sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep" (John 10:12-13).

We know that the sheep in this parable are God's people. The wolf is one who desires to attack the Church, to snatch and scatter the flock. One who prowls around hungry, waiting for an opportunity to strike and devour the sheep. The wolf is the devil. The devil's desire is to destroy the faith of believers and to lead people to Hell, as many people as he can get. The devil watches for any opportunity to attack the sheep.

The hired hand is a man who leaves the flock open to the wolf's attack. He isn't some outside force or threat, but an internal one. The hired hand wound up in the place of a shepherd, but he has no love for the sheep. The hired hand cares only to preserve his own skin.

Our Lord is not a hired hand. He is the Good Shepherd. When the wolf comes, hungry and ready to devour, the hired hand flees to save his own skin. The Good Shepherd stands in the way of the wolf. So the wolf devours the shepherd. Instead of mutton, he gets a mouthful of shepherd's pie. The Good Shepherd becomes a substitute for the sheep. And the wolf is full. The sheep are spared.

On the cross He died on behalf of His sheep, that they would not die because of their sin, and so that they shall live with Him, as it is written in our Epistle, "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. For you were straying like sheep but have now returned to the Shepherd and

Overseer of your souls” (1 Peter 2:24-25). Our Lord lays down His life. It was not taken from Him, but given of His own accord. Because it was His desire to save His sheep from the devil.

Our Lord lays down His life in a different manner than others can. Our Lord lays down His life and takes it up again. The wolf, when it ate the shepherd, thought it was getting a good meal. But our Good Shepherd is much greater than the wolf realized. The wolf cannot contain the shepherd, and his belly is burst open. Our Lord overcomes death and the devil. He lives. He shepherds His flock.

Jesus says, “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” (John 10:16). The sheep of “this fold” were those whom God had already gathered from among the Jews. Those “that are not of this fold” still needed to be gathered. The Jews who had not yet come to saving faith, the pagan Gentiles, and even those not yet born, like us. Jesus seeks to bring all people to saving faith, as it is written in Ezekiel, “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 a day of clouds and thick darkness. And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land.” (Ezekiel 34:12-13). Their own land is not an earthly kingdom, it is not the nation of Israel. Jesus says, “my kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). Our own land is the land our Good Shepherd prepares for us, where He makes us lie down in green pastures, and leads us beside still waters. It is heavenly Jerusalem.

We are made His sheep through Baptism, wherein He calls us by name and binds Himself to us. We say your full name while baptizing, and then the words, “I Baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

Jesus says, “I am the Good Shepherd. I know my own and my own know me” (John 10:14). Jesus knows His sheep personally. This isn’t a mere intellectual, ‘I am aware that you exist,’ but a personal knowing of each one of His sheep, of each one of us. Jesus describes this knowing, “just as the Father knows me and I know the Father” (John 10:15). He compares His knowledge of us and ours of Him to the Father’s and His knowledge of the other. His knowledge of us is familial. This knowledge is a deep loving bond between Him and us, and He shows us this love through His actions: “I lay down my life for the sheep” (John 10:15).

He loves us in this way because He is our Good Shepherd. No one can be a shepherd unless he has sheep. Just as you cannot be a father without first having a child, or a husband without a wife. Now, I can't personally speak as to what raising sheep is like. But I know what it is like to be a husband. I know what it is like to be a father. I love Katie and Clara. That's how a husband feels towards his wife, and a father towards his daughter. That's how our shepherd feels towards us. Jesus lays down His life for His sheep because He is our shepherd, and we are His sheep.

His love is shown through how He protects us from hired hands. Jesus responds to their threat by sending faithful shepherds. He sent the apostles, who lived the words we read in our Epistle, "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in His steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth. When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to Him Who judges justly. 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" (1 Pet 2:21-24). The apostles followed in Christ's footsteps, facing exile, prison, mockery, they were crucified, beheaded, hung, pierced with arrows and spears, and flayed. And after them Our Lord sent more faithful shepherds to guide the sheep. They too, faced persecution, even persecution to death, but they remained steadfast, giving up their lives for their sheep. While the hired hands flee for fear of persecution, to this day faithful pastors keep watch over their flocks. After all, "pastor" simply means "shepherd." Christ has given us the Office of Holy Ministry in order to protect the sheep from the devil.

Christ, our Good Shepherd, shows His love for the sheep through His death and through His continual protecting and gathering of all His sheep. We may take comfort in Him and trust that He continues shepherding His beloved sheep. Because He is our shepherd, the Good Shepherd, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

In His Name.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Christ is Risen!