



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church
www.mzluth.org

May 3, 2009
4th Sunday of Easter

Dennis Griepentrog

First Lesson: Acts 20:28-32
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 23
Second Lesson: 1 Peter 5:1-4
Gospel: John 10:11-18

The Risen Christ is our Good Shepherd

Welcome to worship today! This Sunday is the 4th Sunday of Easter. As we come together to worship our Lord today we are directed to the truth: **The Risen Christ is our Good Shepherd.**

This morning's worship will not have a sermon. Instead, we will have a devotion that will introduce each of the readings and the psalm.

The readings with this Sunday begin a gradual transition from the Half Year of Our Lord to the Half Year of the Church, from the way that God won our salvation to the way we live our salvation. From now until Pentecost they focus on the nature of our relationship with the Risen Christ through his Word: the relationships of Shepherd and sheep, of Vine and branches, of Friend with friends, of Patron and protected. This morning we are directed to the familiar scriptural image of the risen Jesus as our Good Shepherd and his believers as the sheep of his flock.

Devotion on First Lesson

Why do you teach a child to look both ways before crossing a street? Why do you lock your car doors when you park at the grocery store? Why do you put dangerous chemicals out of the reach of a young child?

The answer to each of these questions is essentially the same. You do these things to avoid danger – the danger of a speeding car, a lurking thief, and a poisonous chemical, to be precise. We take the time to avoid things that we know are dangerous. We make the extra effort to look both ways to be certain we have not missed an unseen danger.

God sent Jesus to be our Good Shepherd to protect us from eternal dangers. Jesus lived in our place perfectly and then died as the punishment for our sin so that we do not have to spend eternity in hell. There is no greater love that could possibly be shown to us. Yet here is the amazing thing about our God: His love does not stop there.

He sent the Spirit into our hearts to create faith. Through the Word of grace he brings us into the sheepfold of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. Once we are in the flock, he continues to demonstrate his love by sending others to be “under shepherds” of the Good Shepherd to watch over, protect, and nourish us with the Gospel.

Our all-knowing God knows that there will be those from within the flock and those outside of the flock who will knowingly or unknowingly seek to lead us away from the Word of grace that connects us to him. That is why he gives us the warning and

exhortation we hear in our first lesson. “Be on your guard!” Watch out! Be in the Word of grace. It will build you up. It will preserve your inheritance.

Many seek to undermine the Word of grace by saying, “You can make the Bible say whatever you want; it’s all a matter of interpretation.” People that say this are too lazy to dig into the Word themselves. In their voices, hear the growl of a wolf looking to harm you. Turn back to the loving voice of your God who has urged you to “look both ways” so that you stay eternally safe.

Our First Lesson is Acts 20:38-42

Acts 20:38-42

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

"Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

This week’s psalm of the day is Psalm 23. It may well be the most loved psalm and the most well known psalm in all of scripture. You know the pictures that are there very well.

God is our Shepherd. What kind of shepherd? He will always be the good shepherd who meets our every need. He gives us the food we need by leading us to the green pastures of his Word. He sees to it that we have everything we need for our body and life so that we will never be in want. He is there when we are threatened. He is there with his comfort. Wherever we are in life we know that our good shepherd is with us, he loves us, and he will protect us. He is there for us now.

But Psalm 23 also reminds us he is with us forever. Our shepherd meets our greatest need by taking care of forever through his life and death. We know his promises to be with us in the here and now will be kept because he has already taken care of forever. Jesus lived in our place. Jesus died in our place. This takes away all sin. Through faith in Jesus we have the absolute, certain confidence that we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Devotion on Second Lesson

Our second lesson speaks directly to the “under shepherds” God has placed over us. Peter reminds them to remember and follow the example of The Shepherd. The Spirit moves Peter to point the under shepherds to the reward of God’s grace that awaits them. This is what is to move them to serve, not money or compulsion. God’s faithful shepherds serve because of God’s faithfulness. They do not serve because the sheep threaten them or seek to remove them if they do not do this or that. Shepherds lead and protect. Sheep follow and are blessed by the message of the gospel that is

shared with them. When the flock threatens the faithful shepherd, the “Roaring Lion” wins. The flock should value highly the love of God for the flock that he sends them such shepherds. If the reward for faithful shepherds is so great, then the love of The Shepherd for his *under* shepherds must also be very great. The shepherds should be encouraged by the promise and the flock should be both warned and comforted by that same promise. Just remember too: The glory is certain but it is promised for the future, not for the moment. Present glory is temporary; only that to come remains forever. Don't be impatient. Be faithful!

Our Second Lesson is 1 Peter 5:1-4

1 Peter 5:1-4

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

Devotion on the Gospel

“I never saw that coming.” Sometimes a person reacts that way to a TV show or a movie. They were completely taken by surprise by the plot twist or the ending. It makes the movie memorable and certainly enjoyable.

What we went through in Christmas, Epiphany, and Lent would never lead us to believe that Easter would be the outcome. The only reason you and I believe it is that God has given us the gift of faith. To those without faith it seems foolish – foolish like a hired hand dying for the sake of the sheep. Yet this is what we believe the Good Shepherd did. This is why we rejoice, worship, sing and shout hallelujah!

The whole work of Jesus from Christmas to Easter had this in mind; that he should be and remain our Good Shepherd and we should be and remain his sheep.

All in all, it's a bad bargain for the shepherd! The hired hand acts rationally. He is worth more intrinsically and certainly to himself than a hundred sheep and shouldn't die for any of them. In the case of Jesus that is true a thousand fold. But look what happens! Everything is upside down and backwards. He for whom the whole of creation exists freely and willingly sacrifices himself for the sheep who add nothing to his own infinite worth. The Father even agrees with that sacrifice. He loves the sheep; it would seem, even more than he loves the Shepherd! For it is his will that the Shepherd become the Good Shepherd in just this way. So much they love the flock! You would have to be a stone not to be moved by such love *for you!* Listen to his voice! It gives the life that he laid down and has now taken up again.

Our Gospel is John 10:11-18

John 10:11-18

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me-- just as the Father knows me and I know the Father--and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life--only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."