



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
www.mzluth.org

April 21, 2024

Pastor Dave Ruddat

4th Sunday of Easter

First Lesson: [Acts 20:28-32](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 23 CW

Second Lesson/Sermon Text: [1 John 4:1-6](#)

Gospel Lesson: [John 10:11-18](#)

**Resurrection Reality: The Risen Savior Provides Good Shepherding
Your Good Shepherd Does Not Want You to be Alone**

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace, mercy and peace are yours from God our Father, through our Lord and our Savior, Jesus Christ:

*Direct us now, O gracious Lord, to hear aright your Holy Word.
Assist your minister to preach, and let the Holy Spirit teach.
And let eternal life be found by all who hear the Gospel sound.
Amen.*

Dear friends in Christ, **your Good Shepherd never intends for you to be alone.** He never intends for you to be all by yourself.

Wait a minute, pastor! You don't know what it's like to be the only one in your family that goes to church or the only person at the workplace who goes to church on Sunday. You don't know what it's like to be alone!

Pastor, you don't know what it's like. I don't have any support from my spouse when it comes to the things of God. It seems like no one else is going through the same struggles that I am.

Or, someone might say, I get it. The Good Shepherd never intends for us to be alone. He gives us the community here, a community of believers, but why does He surround me with idiots? Why do I have to bring everybody up to my level of sanctification?

John writes about not being alone. Although he is writing to a specific group of people at a specific time, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we know that he is writing to us as

well and he is telling us our Good Shepherd never intends for us to be alone. The reason why I know this is by looking at what John had to say, and his use of pronouns. There, I said it, pronouns. How John uses pronouns lets us know that our Good Shepherd never intends for us to be alone. The two pronouns I want you to focus on as you look at [1 John 4](#) is "them" and "us." John tells us there still is a "them," and he tells us there still is an "us."

As he is writing to these Christians, and also by inspiration of the Holy Spirit writing to us, he is writing to people who do feel isolated for one reason or another. So they are looking for community somewhere. John warns them and says not every community is good. Not every voice that you're listening to is a good voice. He says, **"...do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God..."** John gives a seemingly simple determination as to see whether a voice you are listening to, or a group or a community that you belong to, whether this group is actually from God and whether this group is actually good for you. What is his determination? He says, **"Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God..."** Seemingly simple yet sometimes we think that just means if everyone says that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, they are legit. Not so fast!

Why was Jesus incarnate? Why was it that Jesus took on human flesh? Go back to [Genesis](#), Adam and Eve in the Garden. God goes and is with Adam and Eve, that first community together, enjoying their company and talking with one another. But Adam and Eve broke that relationship, that community. But throughout the Old Testament you see God still wanting to bring that community back. So He promises that someone born of a woman would crush the serpent's head there in the Garden. Throughout the Old Testament you have God appearing to, let's say Abraham, in the three persons. Here God is being with His people. Or you think of other times when the Israelites were coming out of Egypt and one time Moses and Aaron and the elders went into the Tent of Meeting and ate and drank with God. God removed whatever barrier it was so that they could be with Him without God striking them dead. Throughout the Old Testament, God wants to be with His people in an incarnational way. Not just like God being a spirit waving over here, but with His people.

Now how do you get to Bethlehem? There Jesus is born of a woman. He lives and breathes on this world. He eats with His disciples, gets tired, spends time with them, rejoices with them and then goes to the cross, suffers on the cross so that we could be with God forever. Now fast forward to [Revelation](#)—what are the pictures of Revelation? God is with His people now, in a very real way, not God floating up somewhere, but now with His people, like this community here, and God is in the midst of them. That's what John is talking about, Jesus coming in the flesh. But it's not just something we're waiting for, to happen in the future.

Consider what happens on two of your Sundays out of the month. Simple bread, simple wine, the Words of Jesus spoken over them, there is Jesus' body and blood as we are eating and drinking it. God is in the midst of His people. That's the kind of God He is—a God in the flesh, coming in the midst of His people, enjoying their company.

But any spirit that denies that God has done everything it takes so that we could be with Him forever is not from God. As I told that whole story of God restoring that community, God is doing all the work, isn't He? He is the one sending His Son. His Son is suffering and dying for us. He sends the Holy Spirit so that we would believe it. He sends the pastors, He brings us into a community, through the waters of baptism, and then also now, this community eats and drinks the body and blood of Christ together with the bread and the wine. This is God doing all the work because He wants to be with us. John says anybody who comes to you and says anything different than that is not from God. Anyone who teaches anything different is not from God. He even puts a label on it. He says, ***"...every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world."***

Antichrist, we hear that word and we think something like antifreeze. You use antifreeze to keep your engine from freezing up. It's against freezing. So when we hear the word "antichrist" and even some voices in our world, when they think of "antichrist" they think of someone going against Christ. Yes, that's true, but that's not the original intent of what John is talking about. He is talking about someone who is going in the place of Christ, giving you a different Christ than what He has revealed in His Word. That's the antichrist John says. That is someone who is telling you about a God who is not the one who wants to be with His people in an incarnational way; the one who creates a community through Word and Sacrament and feeds that community through the Lord's Supper. Anyone who says anything different than that is antichrist. Whatever they are promoting, no matter how good it feels, whether you feel like you are a part of the community and that you are no longer alone, John says it's not from God.

So, dear brothers and sisters, there still is a "them." The voices that we're listening to, preachers we hear, material that we read, there still is a "them." There still are forces out there, as John says (They are already there in John's day. They are already here today.), that are trying to lead us away from a God who does everything for our salvation, who brings us into a wonderful community and a family, who keeps us in that family through Word and Sacrament. There are voices that are going to lead us away from that, and they are not from God.

As Christians, I think we need that reminder because sometimes we're thinking about the invisible Church. Yes, we know we are not the only ones going to heaven. That is definitely true. The Holy Spirit works through the Word. But there are voices and there

are materials that are leading us away from a God who is incarnational to a different sort of god; maybe a god who is sovereign and powerful and makes your life easier, for example, or a god who says "You have to do certain things in order to get into my good graces." There still is a "them." And sometimes in our loneliness, we might be listening to voices that aren't from God. It's a reminder for us to be vigilant, to test the spirits, because there are still those who are breaking the Second Commandment—misusing the name of God—to lie and to deceive. And there are times when, in our desire for comfort or community, we've listened to voices that aren't from God. But Jesus still comes to you in His Word.

The one who is in you is greater than the antichrist, so as we think of that, yes, there is a danger but it's not like there is no hope for us. It's not like we're left all alone. John says, ***"You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world."*** He reminds us that God and His Word has overcome the world and all of its false teachers and will keep you strong in the true faith, through His Word and His Sacraments. He will keep your children strong in the true faith through Word and Sacrament. The Good Shepherd has risen from the dead and is still living and active, through His Word and Sacrament, preserving us in the true faith.

So yes, there still is a "them." However, on the flipside, sometimes we can get so vigilant that we forget there is an "us." We can become so vigilant to make sure that yes, there is a "them," "There are voices out there that I shouldn't be listening to" that we forget that there is an "us." We forget that God has brought us into a community together. What brings this community together, what brings a community at Immanuel in Shirley, what brings that community together isn't family or anything but Christ, in His Word. There still is an "us."

So if we have a group of believers gathered here this morning, why is it that sometimes we feel alone? Perhaps because we are not using this community or the community that God has given to us to its fullest potential.

A couple of weeks ago, I shared with my congregation that I had the prognosis (I just found out within the last month or two) that I have prostate cancer. It's a "C" word, yes, and the treatment is very optimistic for the future and all that stuff, but I still felt very alone. Here I am, 47-years-old, and I have cancer. But in sharing that information, guess what happened. A lot of guys from Immanuel Shirley said, "Yeah, I had that too," or "My uncle had that," "My dad had that." I didn't feel so alone anymore. Why is it that we're so afraid to share our struggles with the people that are gathered in the community that God has put us in? Why is it that we are so reluctant to talk about our spiritual struggles with our brothers and sisters in Christ? We don't want them to know, right? We don't want them to know that we are struggling.

Brothers and sisters, who binds us together? Is it not Christ, through His Word and Sacraments? It's not our morality. It's not our lives and how good we have it and if we've got everything figured out. That doesn't bind us together. We're not all like-minded people that have life figured out. We are a community that struggles with sin and needs a Savior. Imagine what this community would be if we didn't share just our triumphs but our struggles so that your brothers and sisters in Christ could be there for you; so that your pastor could be there for you.

I've been in the ministry for 20 years. People said, "I didn't want to tell you this, pastor. I didn't want you to know." That's why I'm here—to bring you Christ! That's why your pastor is here—to bring you Christ! Satan wants to isolate us so that we feel alone. John tells us we are not alone. There still is an "us." Remember how he says, ***"We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us."*** You would think that John would put "I" there as he is warning people that he cares about, "You know that I am from God." But John says "We..." There still is a "we." There still is an "us." There still is a community that God brings together through Word and Sacrament.

That's a lesson that we need to learn as a community. That's a lesson that we need to learn as churches as well. How difficult is it for you if I were to say "Share something from Immanuel Lutheran in Shirley," or if I said to people at Immanuel in Shirley, "Share something that is going on at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church." Why are we recoiling when that concept is coming up? Because sometimes we forget there is an "us." We are part of this greater community that God has put together. What binds us together isn't family or location. What binds us together is Jesus Christ, through His Word and Sacrament. We are an "us" and we are part of a greater "us," of a greater synod that confesses the same things about Jesus Christ, this incarnational God. We're not alone.

We're not alone. Sometimes we'll feel alone and sometimes the reason we feel alone is our own fault. Our own sinful nature has isolated us. We don't want to share our problems and struggles with someone else. Sometimes we are finding community in all the wrong places. But thankfully, your Good Shepherd still wants you to be in His family. He still wants you to be in His community. There still is an "us." There still is your Good Shepherd, who guides you and me through Word and Sacrament, until one day we can be together as one big family in heaven. Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:7) Amen.