

The Christian Funeral of Marvin Keith Cantrell  
9 December, Anno Domini 2017  
St. John 10:11-16  
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Praise be to God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, that through Word and water, our dear brother Marvin was made a precious lamb of God. He was washed clean of all his sins. He was rescued from sin, death, and everlasting condemnation. He was given the Holy Spirit and promised the resurrection of His body and soul to eternal life with Christ. But all lambs need a Shepherd. Without shepherds, sheep wander into danger. They get lost and confused. They are essentially defenseless and there are predators everywhere. And so we are in this world. It would be nice to think that once we are drawn up out of the baptismal waters life would be nothing but peace and serenity. In truth, life is anything but that. The baptized live in a world broken by sin, darkened under the constant shadow of death. There is cancer. There are broken homes. There are sleepless nights. There is loneliness, anger, fear, and unbelief. The wolves are everywhere. They are hungry. They are strong. And we are weak.

We need a Shepherd. We need one who can beat back the wolves who are always circling. We don't need those hirelings who flee, who tell us what we love to hear, who would rather see us perish than make us uncomfortable or offend us. We need a Shepherd who will continue to guide us away from danger and into safety, who will speak the saving truth into our ears. God the Father has given us that Shepherd - His own beloved Son, Jesus Christ. This true, Good Shepherd has no greater care than the life of the sheep. There is nothing He will not do to protect us and guide us away from danger. This Good Shepherd has indeed laid down His life for us. He has allowed the wolves of death and eternal judgment to tear into His innocent flesh so that they would be satisfied and unable to harm us. On the cross, the Jesus, the Good Shepherd, offered Himself in our place as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The great debt of our sin, the sin of the whole world, Marvin's sin, your sin, has been paid in full.

Yet we are sheep who love to wander. We foolishly think that we can do without the Shepherd. We know what we need and what we want. And that always means trying to make our own way, trying to face the wolves alone, even embracing them as though they are our friends. We indulge our sinful and deceitful desires because they are pleasing to the eye, never mind that our Creator has told us that they are poison. We think that our own works, our own goodness will be enough. But they aren't. They are nothing because they aren't really as good as we want to believe they are. Our hearts are still filled with jealousies, anger, selfishness, and pride.

Without the Shepherd we simply cannot and will not survive. Those who tried have failed. We cannot face death without the Shepherd, without the good news of the forgiveness of sins that He preaches and bestows. When the holy and perfect Law of the holy and perfect God says "Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect", we have nowhere to run and hide, no excuses to make. We haven't. And for that we should perish.

We need the Shepherd. He alone has destroyed death. It is only His Word that can give us life. It is only His Word that can free us from the guilt of our sin. It is that word that gave life to Marvin and kept him. For the last year or so it has been my joy to visit with Marvin each month and proclaim to him the good news that Jesus, His Shepherd has forgiven all his sins and that even though his body suffered the corruption of sin and death, that would only be for a time and that one day, Marvin would be forever free from the wolves - sin and death would no longer be able to touch either his body or his soul because Christ would shepherd him safely into the heavenly pastures. And so Jesus has done. Through the valley of the shadow of death, the Good Shepherd has led his dear lamb, Marvin, out of death, delivering him from all suffering into the gates of eternal life.

Christ's sheep are always safe as long as they remain with the Shepherd. Under His watchful eye and tender care, the flock remains at rest, even when chaos and unrest and death rage all around us. There is nothing more soothing to the lambs of Christ than the voice of their Shepherd. We need it. We long for it. We daily need to hear the promises of Christ - the promise that we will not die because of our many and terrible sins because Jesus has already died for them in our place. Our dear brother Marvin needed to hear this, and by God's grace he did. Death had been staring Marvin in the face since the day he first heard those words - You have cancer. But Christ spoke a different word - Marvin, you are Baptized, you

are alive. And Marvin confessed his faith in that promise, that even though the cancer should cause his physical death, he would still not be dead because he would not be separated from Christ. Having passed through death, Christ has risen triumphantly from the grave and grants His victory to all who believe and are baptized and remain with him.

And we who remain, who are filled this day with sadness, need the same comfort and hope that Marvin did. Our troubles and our sorrows may look different but the answer to those sorrows and troubles are the same - the Lord Jesus Christ who humbled Himself and took on our sinful flesh that He might bear the fullness of our sins and be our Savior. We need His gentle voice of promise to guide us through the coming days so that we do not lose hope, to drive away the wolves who would attack in our time of weakness and sorrow. In Christ, our tears can give way to joy, knowing that those who confess Christ, who wear the white robes of His righteousness, who feed on the green pastures of His Body and Blood, are truly never separated because we are knit together into the mystical body of Christ, the Holy Christian Church, and as one flock, follow the voice of our Good and loving Shepherd, the Lord Jesus, as He leads us through the gates of eternal life.

Apart from Christ and the gifts of life that He gives, this day and the day of our own death can only be filled with hopelessness and despair. Only the Good Shepherd has overcome death. Only the Good Shepherd can lead us safely to life. Apart from Him nothing is certain and death looms as an unconquerable foe. But in Him and with Him, there is safety and assurance because death has no power over Jesus. And all who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death. He died and the baptized have all died with Him. We were buried with Him and just as surely as He rose to life, so to shall the baptized who confess Him rise again. And yes, even now, we walk in newness of life, the joy that death has no power over us. We don't need to vainly trust in ourselves and our empty works because the Blood of Christ has set us free. Let us not walk in the darkness of sin, indulging those sinful desires which God has shown us in Christ are nothing but sin and death. Let us walk rather in the light of Christ and the joy of His resurrection so that we too, may follow with Marvin and the whole Christian Church in heaven and on earth into everlasting life.

Dearly beloved, I know these coming days and weeks and months are going to be difficult. Marvin will not be there sitting at his spot on the

couch. He won't be with you around the Christmas tree, opening gifts or ringing in the new year. But I want you take comfort in this even as you mourn - Marvin lives. He is at rest and peace with Christ, awaiting the day of Christ's return to judge the living and the dead when at last all of God's people will be together again, never to be separated again by death, never to taste the sorrow and bitterness of sin. Christ, the Good Shepherd, who laid down His life for Marvin, has laid down His life for you. And the same Shepherd who watched over and kept Marvin through death will keep you through your sorrow, speaking the peace and hope of His death and resurrection to your aching hearts. May God grant His Holy Spirit to us all that we would listen to the voice of Jesus and remain in the flock of His Church, hearing the comfort of His voice and feasting on the gifts of salvation until we with Marvin and all the saints are resting in the presence of our Good Shepherd in His heavenly kingdom. The peace of Christ be with you.

In the Name of +Jesus.