

Misericordias Domini
23 April, Anno Domini 2023
St. John 10:11-16

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Sheep need a shepherd. They cannot fend for themselves. They don't know on their own where the right pasture and the good water are. They wander into danger. They find themselves surrounded by wolves who would drag them off and consume them. You need the Good Shepherd and He has appointed undershepherds to lead you into His pasture and feed you the good food of His grace.

The problem is that there are lots of shepherds out there all trying to lead you somewhere and feed you something. They all claim to know the way to the best, most delicious, most satisfying pasture. Some of them claim to know about new pasture that no one has ever found before. Some of them believe that today's sheep are somehow different and need a different kind of shepherding.

But they are not good shepherds. They are just hirelings. They shepherd for themselves and their own benefit. They don't actually care about the welfare of the sheep and certainly not any particular sheep. They are more concerned about having huge flocks than healthy sheep. They aren't concerned if a sheep leaves because there are plenty to replace them. They let the sheep decide where they want eat, whatever tastes good to the sheep is fine with such hirelings. After all, letting the sheep have what they want and believe whatever they want to believe makes for happier sheep who will keep you as their shepherd.

The problem with these shepherds, these pastors, is that they aren't from the Good Shepherd. They are imposters and deceivers. They are from Satan, the great wolf, who wants only one thing, to lead all the sheep away from Jesus. They fill your ears with all kinds of smooth talk, do all sorts of good things for other people, offer fun programs, and generally make you feel good about yourself. They indulge your pride. They praise you. And that is why the world loves them. They speak of gods, but not the true one. They are inclusive of everything except the truth.

They will perish along with their false teaching and everyone who joins themselves to it. You cannot be of the Good Shepherd's flock and the flock of false gods. You cannot feed on both the rich pastures of Christ and His Word and the false doctrines of these hirelings, whether or not they claim to speak for Christ or not. When the Good Shepherd speaks

His flock listens to Him and gathers around Him and receives the gifts He gives. Christ's sheep flee from the hirelings. They will not listen to the hirelings or participate with them in their lies because lies are deadly not only to the sheep but to everyone who listens to them. And if we will not separate ourselves from the lies, then we agree with the lie and invite others to believe it as well to eternal damnation.

And while these hirelings may try to be sneaky to deceive you, they are really quite easy to spot. If they aren't leading you to Christ who has accomplished your salvation freely and to the Means of Grace where Christ gives you that salvation, you know they are deceivers. Anyone who says anything other than what the Good Shepherd says, is not from the Good Shepherd and is not speaking on behalf of the Good Shepherd. And worse, such hirelings are knowingly or unknowingly leading people away from the Good Shepherd. Hirelings have one thing in common - because they don't preach the pure Gospel for salvation, because they mingle in the Law with the Gospel - they will always lead you to look at yourself and your obedience for assurance of your salvation.

That is not the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. What other shepherd has done that? What other shepherd has died for sheep that love to wander? What other shepherd has born the hatred, the idolatry, and the unbelief of the sheep so that those cantankerous, fickle, selfish sheep might live and be spared the death that their own sin deserves? And what other shepherd wants such sheep in their flock? Hirelings want good, healthy, strong, obedient sheep; sheep that can bring a good profit. Not so the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd seeks after the sinful, sick, weak, wandering sheep because He wants to save them, whatever it costs Him. He shepherds for the benefit of sheep not His own. He wants His sheep to rest in Him, to feast on the rich food of Holy Communion, to drink deeply of the comfort that is poured out in Holy Baptism. Christ Jesus, the true and only Good Shepherd, knows His sheep by name. And the true sheep of the Good Shepherd know Him and will listen only to His voice and follow where it leads them, even into suffering and death because the Good Shepherd, even in death, will give life. And true sheep flee all false shepherds, all those who do not speak the truth of the Good Shepherd. They reject and condemn all false teachers and their teachings and confessions because those teachers and teachings lead only to eternal death. The true sheep of Christ do not tolerate or participate in false worship, they do not abide those who would mix the saving teaching of their Shepherd with the damning teaching of the wolf. They would suffer rejection, persecution, loss of worldly comfort and friendship, even death, as did their Good Shepherd, rather than be joined by word or deed to those who hold to a false god or a false Christ.

It is sinful for the baptized child of God, who has rejected all of Satan's works and all of Satan's ways to then join churches and organizations who confess other ways of salvation, who deny the Gospel by teaching that our works either motivate God to save us or ensure our salvation after faith has begun. It is sinful for the baptized to join with

those who empty and denigrate the Means of Grace as mere outward acts of obedience which we render to God. It is sinful for the baptized to tolerate any preaching which robs Christ of His glory as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and gives even an ounce of that glory to man. It is sinful for the baptized not to follow Christ to the pastures and waters which He Himself has prepared, the precious Means of Grace which He prepared through His suffering and death and which He offers for our salvation and comfort. Satan is a master at his craft and he will say and do whatever is necessary to lead any and all away from Jesus. You cannot follow after two shepherds and you cannot be in more than one fold. On the Last Day, all who try will hear those terrible words from the one, true shepherd - "Depart from me. I never knew you."

Beloved, give heed to the Good Shepherd's voice. It is the only one calling you to salvation. It is the only one that invites you to rest in the full and free forgiveness of all your sins. Forsake the hirelings. They only deceive on behalf of the devil and their bellies and don't care about your destruction. Listen to Christ and to His Holy Scriptures. Let them lead you in the way to salvation, to the Lord Jesus who has laid down His life and taken it back up for you. He alone loves you. He would have you remain only in His fold, together with all who hear His voice, that He may save you and care for you. Do not be deceived and led astray by the strange voices of the hirelings. Reject them for what they are - liars and murderers of souls. Your Good Shepherd loves you and will not deceive you. He will not lead you astray nor will He withhold from you any good thing. Listen to His voice and know the peace and the comfort that He alone can give.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

In the Name of +Jesus.
Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keeps your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.