

Misericordias Domini
19 April, Anno Domini 2026
St. John 10:11-16

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

Dearly beloved flock of the Good Shepherd,

On Good Friday we heard the cry of Isaiah “We all like sheep have gone astray; we have turned - every one - to his own way.” Now, behold, the most merciful work of the Good Shepherd. He gathers up His sheep from wherever they have been scattered. He gathered Thomas. He has gathered you. He has rescued you from the wasteland of eternal judgment and sorrow where you had wandered as you indulged the desires of your heart. He brought you out of the darkness of unbelief which had you chasing after idols, seeking to satisfy your hunger with things that are not true food and your thirst with things that are not true drink.

Scattering and devouring are the works and goals of the wolves. The devil, the world, and your flesh with their lies and threats seek to scatter you away from the Good Shepherd, to destroy your faith. They play on your anxieties and your pride to lure you into gluttony and greed, sloth and lust, wrath and envy. The wolves of false teachers with their smooth tongues and their sheep disguises say things in the name of the Good Shepherd that He never said, even things that are directly contradictory to what the Shepherd has said because “It’s what Jesus really meant.” When our hearts follow after these things, when we follow the siren song of those who tell us what we want to hear rather than what the Scriptures teach, then we leave the pastures of Christ’s flock, separated from His goodness and His grace. We follow in Thomas’ steps and remove ourselves in body and soul from Christ’s body. The wolves only cause chaos and division - division between you and God and thus division between you and your fellow man.

It is only the Good Shepherd who is involved in gathering. He draws sinners to Himself and unites us to Himself and thus unites us to one another. He breaks down the wall of division between you and God by laying down His own life, by bearing your iniquity in His Body on the cross. He was separated from God so that you might be forever united to God. He laid down His life for the sheep, not Himself. He was not concerned with personal ambitions or aspirations. Nothing He does is driven by the opinions or desires of men. Nor does He force you back to God. The Good Shepherd speaks. He makes known the Holy Law of God and

thereby shows you that you have wandered away from Him. He shows you that you are lost and walking into death. He mercifully disciplines His beloved flock with His rod and staff, not to harm them but to protect and save them, sometimes from themselves as much as from the wolves. He speaks the Gospel of forgiveness to bind up broken hearts and sooth aching consciences.

And how does He do this? He calls and ordains what one pastor wisely called God's sheepdogs (because there is one Good Shepherd) in your midst and bestows upon them His authority to speak His life-giving Word and feed you with the bread of heaven. When your pastor says "I forgive you all your sins," that is Christ your Good Shepherd speaking to you Himself. That is what Christ promised you when He said to the apostles and all who follow in their office "He who hears you hears Me." Jesus said that for your benefit so that you may be filled with certainty that your sins truly are forgiven before God in heaven. Your pastor is God's messenger to you. He does not bring you his own word. He does not direct the sheep wherever they want to go. His eyes are always watching the Good Shepherd. His ears are always listening to the voice of the Good Shepherd to direct the flock away from danger and into the daily pasture of Christ's Word.

These faithful sheepdogs are always on the lookout for wolves masquerading as sheep among the flock to unmask them and drive them off. That is dangerous business. Wolves can be ferocious. They will not be deprived their meal without a fight. No faithful sheepdog completes his time of service without scars.

Sometimes the sheepdog has to nip at a sheep that is beginning to stray. He doesn't do this to harm the sheep but because he loves the Shepherd and His flock and wants them safe. Your pastor admonishes you for the same reason a father admonishes his child - he loves him enough to warn him and point out danger. The sheepdog wants to protect what the Shepherd laid down His life to obtain. The will of the sheepdog is the will of his Shepherd. He works and lives to hear the Shepherd say "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Lord."

And though the faithful pastor does not speak or act in order to gain the approval of the sheep, in the flock of the Good Shepherd, the sheep must always be attentive to see that the sheepdog is carrying out the will of the Shepherd. I am held to the same Word that you are. I too am a sheep in the flock of the Shepherd. I need the same green pastures and quiet waters. I too have been brought into the flock by the mercy of the Shepherd who sought me out when I was lost in sin and death. Like He has done for you, so the Good Shepherd has done for me, washing me in the waters of Holy Baptism and placing me in the charge of other sheepdogs who

through patient teaching and admonition and encouragement brought me to hunger and thirst for the rich pasture of God's Word which is all life and light and truth. At times they had to nip at my heels and direct me away from trying to taste the poisonous fruits of sin and call me to repentance. Other times they had to teach me how my thinking was contrary to the Word of God. This, perhaps even more than their praise and encouragement, were acts of deep love and faithfulness because it was hard and brought with it the very real possibility that I would reject them. But like a true and loving parent, a good pastor would rather faithfully speak God's Word of truth and have you reject them than feed you a lie just to make you happy and like them and line their pockets.

Fathers and grandfathers, though you may not have been called by God into the Office of the Holy Ministry, you are the appointed sheepdog of your family, appointed and charged by God to stand diligent watch over them in both body and soul. You have the great joy of filling their hearts and minds with the rich, life-giving food of Holy Scripture. By God's mercy, you have been blessed to make Him known to them in your words and in your deeds. In you, your wife and children have the opportunity to see the true Bridegroom and true Father. Just as your Good Shepherd actively tends to both your bodily and spiritual care, you are to tend to those of your family. Do not make assumptions or let them decide for themselves. You have been given authority to pray with and for them, to teach them the Small Catechism, to bring them here into the presence of Christ that together you may be fed and nourished. You are also commanded to speak the Good Shepherd's words of admonition and correction in love to steer them away from danger. You must model for them at all times the life of faith and piety that they may emulate it. They need to see you go to confession, praying, reading the Bible, receiving Holy Communion, and singing. They need to hear you speaking about Jesus even when it is unpopular. They need to see and hear you fighting off the wolves, choosing the things of God over the things of the world, calling out sin, protecting the weak, serving your congregation and your neighbor, giving your tithes. As in the congregation, so also in the home, when the sheepdog stops watching and listening to the Shepherd, the flock suffers, scatters, and begins to be consumed by the wolves. And on the last day, the sheepdogs will be held to account by the Good Shepherd.

Wives and children, pray for your husbands and fathers and pastors that God would shape them after the image of the Good Shepherd and make them faithful and brave sheepdogs who delight in the will of the Good Shepherd and who will delight to do the work of leading you to the rich blessings of Christ's kingdom and standing against the wolves who would seek to drag you away from the Good Shepherd and His flock. Submit yourselves to them out of fear and reverence for

Christ and receive from your husbands and fathers and pastors all the good that He has graciously prepared for you. As the riches of Christ are faithfully and joyfully given and received, all will be richly blessed by the Good Shepherd who loves His precious flock and has delivered our souls from death.

Let our hearts and mouths be filled with the high praises of God who has laid down His life for us and gathered us into His flock. May our Good Shepherd fill us with His Holy Spirit so that we are not deceived by the wolves or wander from Him to chase after the cares and riches and pleasures of this life. Instead, may we be satisfied with the good pastures and quiet waters He has prepared and follow our Shepherd as He leads us to everlasting life.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

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