

**St Paul's Lutheran Church (Latimer, IA)**  
**Misericordias Domini – April 14, 2024**  
**John 10:11-16 – The Good Shepherd**  
**Rev Peter Wagner**

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the risen Lord, Jesus Christ! Amen.

Right before today's Old Testament reading from Ezekiel 34, God confronts the false shepherds of Israel, the false teachers. He rebukes them. "Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts... My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them."

Let this be a warning to all false shepherds and lazy pastors. God will bring them to account. He will hold them responsible for taking advantage of his flock, for leading them astray and scattering them. For there are certainly many false shepherds in the world. Shepherds only out for attention and easy gain. Careless shepherds who don't dig deeply into Scripture. And lazy shepherds who don't seek the lost sheep. Sadly, no pastor is free from any of these sins.

And then there are also wolves in sheep's clothing, wicked shepherds who intentionally pervert God's word. For example, the false leaders of the ELCA – some of us still call it the American Lutheran Church. The ELCA and other denominations like it intentionally pervert God's word. They preach a misleading gospel that is very appealing to the world. They say: God accepts everyone just the way they are. Sin, they say, is a matter of intention. If you faithfully love your partner, it doesn't matter if you're both the same gender. God will be happy. If you fight social injustices, it doesn't matter if you neglect Christ crucified. God will be happy.

Obedying the law is a matter of the heart, it's true. But a sincere heart also seeks to follow and keep the full word and will of God, not pick and choose.

So the ELCA teaches as doctrines the commandments of men. It fails to call sinners to repentance and offer forgiveness and newness of life. Its false shepherds do not bind up the wounded sheep. Instead, they try to tell the sheep they have no wounds to bind. They tell the sheep that anyone who confronts sin is the real enemy.

The truth is that all have sinned, all need forgiveness for the sake of the blood of Jesus. God accept none of us just the way we are. None are holy, except his Son. Only in Christ are we forgiven and raised to live a new life before God. "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed." That is the true, living, glorious gospel of Christ in which we stand. Not some powerless manmade social gospel.

So God will execute justice on all who lead his sheep astray. He will save his chosen sheep from their jaws. He himself will be their shepherd. His rod and his staff will comfort them. He will bind up their wounds. He will prepare his banquet before them and pursue them with his goodness and mercy forever.

Therefore, Jesus said three times to Peter, "Feed my sheep." And Peter later commanded all pastors, "Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory."

This is why, every Sunday before I preach, I pray this little prayer of Martin Luther: "Lord God, you have appointed me a pastor and teacher in your church, but you see how unfit I am for such a great and responsible office. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined it all long ago. Therefore I call upon you. Put my mouth and my heart to use. Grant that I may teach the people, and that I myself may learn and meditate diligently on your word. Use me as your instrument, only do not forsake me; for on my own I would surely bring it all to destruction. Amen."

This prayer is a great comfort to me, because it reminds me that I'm not on my own. I'm not the real shepherd. God is.

And that's the point of our Old Testament lesson, from Ezekiel 34. Listen again, and pay attention to how often God uses the word "I": "For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I

seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them... And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel... I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice.”

I count fifteen times. God does it all. I will seek, I will rescue, I will bring them out. I will feed them, I will make them lie down, I will bind them up and strengthen them, I will be their shepherd. God does what no human shepherd can do.

God does it all through his Son, the Chief Shepherd. Jesus says in John 10, “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.”

Once again: I. Jesus is saying, “I am the Good Shepherd of Ezekiel 34 and Psalm 23. I am the God who loves the sheep, who seeks them out, who rescues them and makes them lie down and binds them and strengthens and feeds them. I do it all.” The Lord is my shepherd, and my Lord is Christ.

Jesus does it all in the church. Look around you. This congregation is the green pasture and the fortified compound where the sheep are safe. Here the Good Shepherd speaks to you by his word. Here you learn to follow his voice. Here Jesus leads you to streams of flowing water, forgiving your sins in his absolution and giving you water day to day in the renewing Holy Spirit, poured out in baptism. And Jesus feeds you by his supper, the rich banquet of his body and blood, so that you eat and drink in his presence. Your cup overflows.

Here in the church, God will not let any wolf snatch away a single lamb. He will provide faithful undershepherds. He will strengthen and reprove the weak shepherds, and drive out the wicked hirelings. He lays down his life for the sheep.

The shepherd and overseer of your souls is calling you here, into this fold, into the church. Come here, week after week, so you never go astray. Come receive the forgiveness the Good Shepherd won on the cross, when he died for you as a sacrificial lamb in your place, to rescue you from death.

Come, where Christ promises to send faithful undershepherds. Men who will not speak their own words, but his, so the sheep will hear his voice. Pastors are not sent to impress by their own holiness and charisma, but to humbly feed the sheep with his true word and sacraments.

Come, let the Good Shepherd lift you onto his shoulders, and bring you home to the church rejoicing.

Let us pray. O Lord, preserve our congregation, our synod, and all the churches of the world. Send us faithful shepherds. Strengthen your shepherds, so they would be faithful servants, not careless and lazy hirelings. Make them always seek your true word and faithfully administer your sacraments. And, Good Shepherd, always guard and keep this little flock, your church, for whom you laid down your life. Let no thief break in and steal, let no wolf snatch or destroy. Be with us here, to bind and strengthen and comfort and feed us, to eternal life. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.