

4th Sunday of Easter.

John 10.22-30

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for the sermon this morning is the Gospel we heard before from John 10:22-30.

22 Then the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem came. It was winter. 23 Jesus was walking in the temple, in Solomon's Colonnade. 24 The Jews gathered around Him and began to ask Him, "How long are You keeping us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly!"

25 Jesus answered them, "I have told you, but you do not believe. The works that I am doing in the name of My Father give evidence about Me. 26 However, you do not believe, because you do not belong to My sheep. 27 My sheep listen to My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me, 28 and I give them eternal life, and they will certainly not be lost, and no one will snatch them out of My hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one can snatch them out of My Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one."

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us in your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen

Dear friends in Christ,

Peace be with you.

Today's reading from the Gospel comes from the Good Shepherd chapter of the Bible, John 10. The three-year lectionary always selects a reading from the Good Shepherd chapter for the Fourth Sunday of Easter.

In the first year, we learn something about who Good Shepherd Jesus is. He is the door to the sheep fold, we are the sheep and He is the only way into eternal safety.

In the second year, we learn something about what Good Shepherd Jesus does. As the Good Shepherd, He lays down His life for the sheep.

In today's reading, we learn about the benefits of who Good Shepherd Jesus is and what Good Shepherd Jesus does. Jesus as our Good Shepherd knows His sheep and His sheep hear His voice and follow Him.

Our text tells us that Jesus was in the temple celebrating the Feast of Dedication. Today, we know this festival as the Feast of Lights or Hanukkah. Jesus had quite a few enemies among the temple authorities by this time in His ministry and every time Jesus made His presence known that He was on the temple grounds, these enemies would seek Him out. They would try and make Him to say or do something that would hurt His credibility with the people.

In the encounter that we heard about in today's Gospel, the authorities asked Jesus to clearly state His claim to be the Christ, now Jesus, in turn, made it clear that He regularly did exactly that, but the authorities rejected His message. Jesus had figured out their problem, and He used the metaphor of sheep to point it out.

Shepherds in the wilderness regions often worked together to guard sheep. During the night, they brought their flocks together and took turns guarding them. That way, they could get some much needed sleep. In the morning, each shepherd would call to his flock and only the sheep belonging to the shepherd would follow.

During the day, the shepherd would lead the sheep to good pasture and water. He would protect them from predators and care for their injuries. He would talk to them sing to them and sometimes play a flout like a recorder, and so they would learn his voice. It became the only voice they trusted. Another shepherd could call, but each sheep responded only to the voice of that sheep's shepherd.

Those who have the Holy Spirit's gift of faith are like those sheep. Jesus is their shepherd. They hear His voice.

When Jesus said the Jewish authorities were not part of His flock, He was saying that they resisted the Holy Spirit. They did not have faith. Without faith they could not believe. They did not listen to Him.

Those who have the Holy Spirit's gift of faith in Good Shepherd Jesus ... that is ... those who are part of Jesus' flock hear Jesus' voice in a different way. So, what's that difference?

Perhaps you've heard someone say that all religions are more or less the same. They all lead to the same place. When you ask such a person to explain what they mean with those words, you'll hear someone who basically sees religion as a sort of self-improvement project. The objective of their religion is for people to make themselves into better people. Then they will point out the fact that almost every religion has a form of the "Golden Rule" like "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Generally speaking, most religions have laws against robbery and murder and other bad actions. Most religions have guidelines for living.

What happens when such a person hears the voice of Jesus? Well, today, we hear the voice of Jesus when we hear God's Word from the Bible. A person who believes that all religion is about improvement will search the Bible for guidelines for living. The result is that they will discover the most severe law. For example: In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught, **"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago: 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be subject to the judgment.' However, I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to the judgment. Anyone who says to his brother, 'You numbskull!' will be subject to the Sanhedrin. However, anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be subject to hellfire.** [Matthew 5:21,22.]

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery!' However, I tell you that everyone who looks at a woman to desire her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. [Matthew 5:27,28.] A person who is not part of the flock of Christ will quickly come to the conclusion that the standards of the Bible are impossible to keep. They will come to hate the voice of Jesus because the law exposes their failings. They will insist that the God of the Bible is cruel and unloving, because He has standards that no one can keep.

So what changes when the Holy Spirit brings a person into Jesus' flock? That is, what happens when the Holy Spirit creates faith in a person? *Martin Luther said that the Holy Spirit calls me by the Gospel.* The person who is part of the flock of Jesus Christ not only hears the law, but also hears the Gospel as well. The person who is part of the flock of Jesus Christ understands that the Gospel is the predominant message of the voice of the Good Shepherd - the Bible.

When the Christian hears the law, he also realizes that the law is impossible. But then he hears the voice of the Good Shepherd say, ***"I have kept the law for you. I give my righteousness to you. It is yours."*** Because Good Shepherd Jesus has given us His perfect thoughts, words, and deeds, we are judged as perfect.

When the Christian hears the law, he hears that he deserves punishment both here in time and forever in eternity. But then he hears the voice of the Good Shepherd say, ***"I have taken this punishment for you. I suffered shame, spitting, beating, flogging, and ultimately death on a cross for you. I endured the Wrath of God for you. Just as I give my righteousness to you, I also take your sin from you."*** Our failing, our shortcomings, our weaknesses, our sins are all paid in full. We are judged as sinless. So how does this affect the sheep's attitude toward the shepherd's voice? How does this affect the Christian's attitude toward the Word of God?

Before the Holy Spirit produces faith, the Word of God is a terrifying thing. It's all law. It's all condemnation. It only warns of punishment.

After the Holy Spirit produces faith, the Voice of the Good Shepherd is both law and Gospel. The law still Shows our sin, but the Gospel shows our Saviour. The Good shepherd's voice becomes a source of confidence, comfort, joy, peace, safety. His voice reveals a God who loves and serves.

The voice of the Good Shepherd is not only loving and comforting, but it's also strong. With His voice, the Good shepherd even leads us through death into life everlasting. For just as He died, He has also risen. And just as He has risen, He will also raise us from the bed of death to new life, a life that will have no sorrow, pain, or death, a life that will never end.

Through the work of the Holy Spirit, Good Shepherd Jesus sends His call out to all people in all places and in all times. The Holy Spirit works through Christ's Word, through Holy Absolution, through Holy Baptism, and through His Holy Meal, to work faith in people and keep that faith strong. Just as Jesus gives the title of Good Shepherd to Himself, He claims all who believe in Him as His sheep. They are His sheep and know Him as the true Christ.

There will always be those who reject the call of the Good Shepherd. The Holy Spirit will offer the gifts of Jesus Christ to them and they will reject them. They will refuse to see the love of God in Jesus on the cross. They will refuse to see the love of God when Jesus comes to us in His body and blood. The danger for them is greater than a mere loss of life on this earth. The danger is the anguish of the eternal outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The future for those who have the Holy Spirit's gift of faith is one of joy. We receive God's service. We are part of the flock of the Good Shepherd. We are under the protection of both the Father and the Son. Death for us will be only a temporary earthly thing. For, just as our Good Shepherd rose from the dead, we too will rise from the grave and enter into eternal joy where we will continue to experience God's love into eternity. As the psalmist said, "**Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.**" [Psalm 23:6.] **Amen.**

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.

Prayer of the Church 4th Sunday of Easter

P Let us pray to the Lord, who in Christ promises goodness and mercy all the days of our lives until we dwell in His house forever.

Brief silence

P All blessing be to You, our heavenly Father, for You have given Your only begotten Son to be both our Passover Lamb and our good Shepherd. Give us penitent ears that are eager to hear His voice and follow Him, always rejoicing that in Christ we have eternal life so sure that no one can snatch us out of Your hand. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P All glory be to You, O God of peace, for You have raised from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of Your sheep. Hear our prayers on behalf of the children and youth of Your flock. Preserve them in the grace and life You gave them in Holy Baptism. Give to them humble hearts that rejoice in Your Word and honour their parents. Protect them from every assault of the devil, the world and their own sinful flesh. When they fall into temptation, deliver them with grace from shame and guilt to the joy that they are Yours for Jesus' sake. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P All wisdom be to You, O God, for You give all good knowledge and bless us with wisdom incarnate: Your Son, Jesus Christ. We ask Your blessing upon pastors of the AELC and the ULMA as they instruct Your people in Your holy Word, that they might properly care for Your Church which Christ has obtained by His own blood. Give to those who prepare to labour in Your Church every good gift for their service. We likewise implore You to bless all teachers of Theological and Doctrinal training in ULMA,, so that those who learn might be properly equipped to serve their neighbour in their daily callings. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P All thanksgiving be to You, O Lord, for You are the Giver of every good gift and blessing, and You are lavish in Your giving. Provide for all of our needs of body and soul according to Your will, and grant us joyful contentment that we lack nothing in Christ, our Good Shepherd. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P All honour be to You, O Lord, for You honour us as Your holy people for the sake of Jesus, and You give us the honour of being Your mouth and Your hands to those around us. Give us eyes to see our neighbour in need, that we might provide for their necessities out of the abundance You have provided to us. Preserve and protect Your Church on earth from violence and persecution; where Your people are given to suffer in this great tribulation, grant them unfaltering confidence that their robes are washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb and that You will wipe every tear from our eyes. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

- P All power be to You, O Lord, for You exercise Your power chiefly in mercy and grace. Remember all who are in need of help in sickness, infirmity, grief and trial *[including*
J. Hear their cries for mercy, deliver them according to Your good and gracious will, and sustain them in grace and faith throughout their days. Lord, in Your mercy,
- C hear our prayer.**
- P All might be to You, O Lord, for Your Son has declared of His sheep, “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish.” We give deep and heartfelt thanks for Your faithfulness to all those who have died in Christ and whose deaths we mourn. Grant us steadfast faith in Christ’s promises of grace and life until that day when we stand in Your glorious presence forevermore. Lord, in Your mercy,
- C hear our prayer.**
- P All blessing, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honour, power and might be to You, for salvation belongs to You, O God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, both now and forevermore. **Amen.**