

"The true Shepherd" John 10:11-16

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

I have to admit that I don't love sheep. Growing up on my farm, I was always thankful that I only had cows, pigs, and chickens on our farm. A couple of our neighbours had (and still have) sheep. Never have I seen animals so constantly in need of help. Sheep are stupid, stubborn, easily panicked and just a general pain to look after. They need a shepherd! In our text for today, Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd. And truly He is the Good Shepherd, for none other than him can fulfil the role.

Being the shepherd of His people is a fulfilment of the Old Testament. As our Old Testament reading from Ezekiel says, " For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. ¹²As 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 from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. " God will search out His lost sheep and will return them to Himself. In our Gospel for today, Jesus identifies Himself as that Good Shepherd, the one doing the seeking and leading.

That is to say, the true shepherd of the people of God is The Lord himself. By stating this, Jesus is telling His disciples (and us) that He is equal to God. However, although the Son is equal to the Almighty

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Father, He has a specific mission. The Father sent Him for this purpose: that He gives His life, as a ransom, as the only complete sacrifice for the sake of all sinners, who have earned eternal damnation. He has become our substitute; He took upon himself our transgressions and died in our place. Thus, the guilty, the sinners, were delivered from sin and destruction. The mission of the Son is to rescue His lost flock from certain death and destruction.

And as Almighty God the Father sent him, Jesus Christ, in turn, sent His church to accomplish this mission: Go and find the scattered sheep and gather them in the fold of the Lord until his return in glory. That mission is still underway today. We are told to continue to gather, spread the good news of Jesus' life and works for us, and minister to our fellow lost sheep. In our creeds, we confess our belief in one holy, universal, and apostolic Christian church.

The church today is holy, because it is instituted by Christ Himself. Just as Jesus began the church by sending out the disciples to the corners of the Earth, it continues to be holy by the working of the Holy Spirit, who gives us faith in Jesus, marking us as holy children of God.

The church is truly universal. Even as we meet in a physical building for in-person worship, or over the internet, we are gathered together as part of an invisible, universal church that encompasses all

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believers. No matter where you are, you have, by the blood of Jesus, the water of Baptism and the power of the Holy Spirit, been made one with the body of Christ.

The church today is apostolic in this sense: By the mandate of our Lord, it must call and ordain ministers to preach the Word of God and administer the sacraments in the manner that the Lord has commanded us. This is the pastoral office. Three words are found in the New Testament for the pastoral office. One is *poimen*, ποιμήν, which is translated pastor. Another is *presbuteros*, πρεσβύτερος, which is translated elder. And in our epistle (1 Peter 2: 21-25), we find this one, which is identified as a title of Jesus Christ as well: "²⁵For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." The Greek word is *episkopos*, ἐπίσκοπος, which means supervisor or guide.

Well, in the New Testament, these words are used without distinction. There are no ranks among the ministers of the church instituted by God. All preach with the same authority, which is the Word of Christ. However, later in the history of the church, the title of bishop was reserved for the leader of the Christian community in a city or region. For example, the Bishop of Jerusalem or the Bishop of Rome. With the development of a hierarchy, the bishops were turned into

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princes or lords of the church. Because of its historical link to the abuse of power in the church, some of our Lutheran churches avoid the use of the title, although others allow for its use in the sense of a supervisor of pastors.

Anyway, to lord it over the church is not the model that Jesus gave to all those who bear the name of pastor as His assistants in the great work. For that purpose, He also puts himself in deliberate contrast with hired hands. Such hirelings, whose only concern is money and the desire to take their ease in Zion, have no interest in the souls of the men entrusted to their care. They are strictly mercenary and will work only if their lives and welfare seem safe. At the first sign of the wolf, at the first sign of real danger or probable persecution, suffering and even martyrdom, they hasten to flee, leaving the sheep to disperse and be killed by their enemies. But the employee does not care; He has no worries, no anxiety, no interest in the sheep.

But, with their Master as an example, the true pastors of the church do not flee in difficult times. With the help of God, they are willing to give their lives for the sheep if necessary. They are faithful to their Lord and His Word. Therefore, the sheep are sure that when the pastor announces in the stead and by the command of our Lord, the

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complete forgiveness of sins, it is the voice of Christ the Good Shepherd.

In this, we have the peace that surpasses all understanding.
Amen.