



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

Christ has risen. . . . He is Risen Indeed!

When you picture in your mind Jesus, how do you see him? Do you see him in the words of the 23rd Psalm, the Shepherd's Psalm? Do you see him cuddling a lamb in His arms? How about a picture like this, that hangs in the pastor's office here at Christ the Servant? Is this how you envision Jesus, the Good Shepherd?

I think that many of us do find great comfort in the words of this familiar Good Shepherd Psalm written by King David. When I am at the bedside of someone who is facing death, this Psalm seems to be very comforting. Often, even when the dying person is not able to remember the names of their loved ones, their own family, they hear that Psalm and mouth the words along as I read them. In fact, never have I had any Psalm but the 23rd requested at a funeral.

So why do you suppose that this Psalm and a Gospel reading from John about sheep are included in our Easter lectionary? What is it about lambs and sheep that calm our hearts? Well, this morning we are going to briefly look at this Psalm and the analogy of us being the sheep and how that makes us delighted to hear His voice.

First of all, we need to understand a bit about sheep. To a casual observer, a flock of sheep all tend to look the same. On careful consideration, we find big

sheep, little sheep, fat sheep and skinny sheep. For the most part they all do look alike. You've seen one you've seen them all!

Secondly, sheep are a pretty helpless animal. They are easy prey for wolves. They have no defensive traits to keep themselves from harm. And so, it is true that the sheep need someone to protect them and keep them safe. Perhaps a shepherd?

Another trait of sheep is that they do have a keen sense of hearing. They can actually tell the difference in human voices. They can tell who their shepherd is, just by hearing his voice.

Keeping our short lesson on sheep in mind, we should look at what Jesus has to say about us, His sheep. In our Gospel reading this morning we hear Jesus talking to those who are at the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem. This feast is today called by its Hebrew name, Hanukah. The Jews present want to know for sure if Jesus is the Christ. They simply want an answer to their inquiry as to who Jesus really is. They have seen his miracles, heard his parables, but still wanted to hear it straight from Jesus' lips that He is the Messiah.

Jesus tells them that he has answered them, and they did not believe him. All those things that he did in God's name should be proof enough that He is the Christ. Yet, they still do not believe because they are not sheep of His flock. He comes back to tell him "My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand."

The Jews do not hear Jesus. They have His Word in the teachings of the Old Testament Scriptures. All of what Jesus did in person was foretold by the prophets and by God revealed through the word. Jesus' actions as pre-told by the prophets and should have led the Jews to figure out that Jesus was truly the Messiah. But they were stubborn and looking for a different kind of King. They wanted someone who would save them from the Romans, not someone that would save them from themselves, the devil, and their own sin.

You see, in the 23rd Psalm we get a glimpse of what Jesus was sent to do. Lots of action verbs in that Psalm. He leads me, restores my soul, prepares, and comforts us. These action words tell us that Jesus will be doing all the work.

It is the Good Shepherd that will do all these wonderful things for us. We are the sheep, look alike, vulnerable, yet we can hear our Shepherds voice.

Jesus did come, and He accomplished all these promises for us by dying a horrible death on the cross, being buried and then rising again on the third day. We won for us the victory over death, sin, and the devil by His glorious resurrection. And that is how Jesus shepherds his sheep. He is leading them to the still waters, reviving their souls, comforting them, and bringing them goodness and mercy and then ultimately delivering them to the house of the Lord for all of eternity.

And folks, all we need to do is to listen to His voice, listen to the Word of God in Christ Jesus. He knows us and we will follow him. And then comes the promise of eternal life.

Remembering back to the shepherd theme, when we hear our shepherds voice, we are to follow him. There are many people in this world today that do not have a shepherd as good as ours. They let their other god's claim their attention. Whether the gods are sex, money, power, or some other vice, they do not promise to give life eternal. They are only as long lasting as the pleasure that they incite in their hosts. They hear a different voice and follow it foolishly. And believe me there are many false shepherds out there who deceive their sheep.

You see even though we are all human and may look the same, we are vulnerable just as sheep are. We hear different voices. So how do you make sure that you are hearing the correct voice, the voice of God? I would guess that is why you are here today, to hear God in word and song. You come to hear a message of hope of eternal life. You want God to speak to you through our worship experience, as we give praise and glory to Him.

As we come to the table this morning, we will be strengthened and nourished, fed if you will, just as sheep. The body and blood of our Lord is freely given to us as we hear our Lord's voice, "Take and eat, this is body given for you. Take and drink, this is my blood shed for you." We know His voice in these familiar words, to "do this in remembrance of me." We come to the table He has prepared; we follow His lead in this most Holy Sacrament.

Also, the fellowship we find here on Sunday mornings is filled with those who continue to not only seek to hear God's voice, but they testify to how they have heard the Shepherd in their lives. This is Christ's church, and we are his

sheep, gathered together as a flock where we can surely hear the voice of our Good Shepherd. He is the true shepherd that loves and cares for His sheep like a Good Shepherd.

And so, it is a good picture we have as we see Jesus in the 23rd Psalm. It does give us great comfort. As His sheep, we delight in hearing His voice. We delight to hear his Word being read, preached, and proclaimed. And we know that our Good Shepherd will walk with us in the world when we leave here this morning. He will be there with us when troubled times arrive. He will be there with us when we are in our darkest valley. He will be there with us when we are in the shadow of death. We should not fear, as we listen to our Lord and Savior, the great Shepherd of His sheep's voice. Goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives, so we too can dwell in His house forever. **AMEN**