

Misericordias Domini (3rd Sunday of Easter): April 14, 2024
“The Wonderful Voice of the Shepherd”

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Today is lovingly known as Good Shepherd Sunday, and it couldn't have come at a better time. As we hear of the Good Shepherd, our Good Shepherd, pray again with me these words from the sermon hymn. Shepherds do well to tend and feed the sheep, and these words rightly put before us many things:

“The servants Thou hast called
And to Thy Church art giving
Preserve in doctrine pure
And holiness of living.
Thy Spirit fill their hearts,
Endue their tongues with power;
What they should boldly speak,
Oh, give them in that hour!

Yea, bless Thy Word alway,
Our souls forever feeding;
And may we never lack
A faithful shepherd's leading!
Seek Thou the wandering sheep,
Bind up the sore opprest,
Lift up the fallen ones,
And grant the weary rest.

Bring those into Thy fold
Who still to Thee are strangers;
Guard those who are within
Against offense and dangers.
Press onward with Thy Word
Till pastor and his fold
Through faith in Thee, O Christ,
Thy glory shall behold.

As the grandness of our Easter celebrations begin to taper off, like many Christians, pastors experience a post-Easter crash. We sing the hype and long for Easter realities, while we continue to live in the muck and mire of the pre-Easter week. While we do so, we also sing, “He lives to silence all my fears; He lives to wipe away my tears; He lives to calm my troubled heart; He lives all blessings to impart.”¹

It seems like we are constantly being told that our voices are important. We are bombarded with a constant seeking that you have to find your voice, and we are given many tools of social media to find an audience of anyone who will listen to anything we have to say about anything at anytime. This creates much anxiety and a constant longing to always have something to say.

What is missing is a sense and the importance of listening. While voices are important, my Grandmas used to say, “God has given us two ears and one mouth to listen more and talk less.” In short, we forget that we are sheep.

Voices are a good thing to have. They convey our innermost thoughts and feelings through words, and words themselves can be good, bad, or ugly. They can be misunderstood. They do not always come out the right way. The same word can be heard differently depending on the hearer. The same word can be spoken differently, depending on the speaker.

Among the many voices and the many words in our world today, there is One that to really stand out among the rest. There is One that is higher than the rest. While sinful humans speak many things in their own voices, there is One voice that speaks to bring the other voices to silence. There is One voice that breaks the hard heart of human pride and righteousness, and One voice that soothes the troubled heart. The Word of God made flesh, Jesus Christ, is that very voice.

With our many devices today we can record and playback the many words that we speak. In God’s gracious wisdom, He has recorded His Words, His voice, to speak to us today. Hear what God’s says about this Voice, this Jesus:

¹ LSB 461 I Know That My Redeemer Lives: stanza 5

Jesus is ***“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”***² These two things, ***“grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.”***³ In Jesus, we see God. What great love for us is shown as this sinless man, the Son of God Himself, is ***“the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”***⁴

One of the many problems today is how to identify the Voice of the Shepherd. The voices of the world are ever around us and they persistently confront and hound our ears. They call us in many ways, blatantly and many times every so cunning, to disobey the voice of God, reject His commands, or like the great deceiver in the garden, to subvert His Word as a way to cover our own self-direction, to twist it and turn it in many different ways.

So just where is the Shepherd’s voice? We find it through His very Word. His voice is proclaimed in the Scriptures. Jesus said, ***“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me.”***⁵ His voice is heard through His ministers in the Office of the Ministry who are to speak with His voice and not their own, ***“Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.’”***⁶

His voice is heard through all who speak His Word to us. Our brothers and sisters in Christ, our spouses, and our children all speak His Word to us. As His love binds us together, we hear Him say, ***“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”***⁷

² John 1:14

³ John 1:17–18

⁴ John 1:29

⁵ John 5:39

⁶ John 20:21

⁷ 1 Peter 2:9–10

Our Good Shepherd's voice is known also by the tools that He carries. Psalm 23 highlights one of these tools. ***“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”***⁸ His Word is a rod that breaks the enemy, protecting the sheep from outside harm. His Word is a staff to lean on in troubled times; to lead to better pastures. The rod and staff is Jesus and His Holy Word. Jesus speaks two kinds of words: Law and Gospel. The Law shows us our sin, our going against God, and how we deserve nothing but God's wrath. He also speaks the greater Word of Grace. A declarative word that forgives our sins, that bestows life and salvation, that proclaims the favor and blessing of God in Christ Jesus.

God uses this unique voice of Law and Gospel for the very benefit of His sheep. He laid down His life for the sheep. He paid for them. He feeds them. He binds them together. As the Good Shepherd looks over His sheep, He can see the pain, He can see the attacks, He can see the wolf, He can see the hired hands, He can see the turmoil among the sheep and He can see the unrest. And to the sheep He declares, ***“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”***⁹

To His sheep, His voice rings out, ***“For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. 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. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”***¹⁰

⁸ Psalm 23:4

⁹ Matthew 11:28

¹⁰ 1 Peter 2:21–25

Our Lord God declares to His sheep, “***I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God.***”¹¹ As He is the Good Shepherd who laid down His life, as He is the Good Shepherd who speaks even now today, as He is the Good Shepherd who continues to watch over us, we are brought to Him and He gives us the gift to lie down in peace.

What’s more, He even gives us a voice. A voice that speaks life in the midst of death. A voice that lives to silence fears so can pray,

- “¹ The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
- ² He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.
- ³ He restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness
for his name’s sake.
- ⁴ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.
- ⁵ You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
- ⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
forever.”¹²

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

¹¹ Ezekiel 34:15

¹² Psalm 23:1–6

Prayer of the Church
Third Sunday of Easter (Misericordias Domini)
14 April 2024

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

O God, send faithful shepherds to care for Your flock here and scattered throughout the world. Keep them devoted to You and Your truth, and so turn them in dutiful service toward Your people. Spare us from hirelings who would serve ego, belly or the world's doctrines. Give discerning ears to Your sheep to listen for the voice of Christ, our Good Shepherd. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Eternal Lord, through the Paschal Lamb You have wrought peace between man and God. By Your gift of good government, grant peace and good days also to our citizens and between the nations of the world, that we and all our neighbors may lead quiet lives in godly contentment. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We thank and praise You for the gift of life and for the protection and care you have provided as *Caden, Elijah, Elizabeth, and Alex* celebrate their birthdays, and *Jana, Lindsey, and Joel* celebrate their baptismal anniversaries. Grant that they may grow in grace, continue to know Your loving-kindness, abide in the confession of Your care and protection, serve You faithfully all the days of their life and finally come to the fullness of Your joys in heaven. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, by the firstfruits of Christ's life from the dead, You secured forgiveness for our troubled consciences. Bless also with temporal health and well-being those who suffer among us *especially for Esther, Ruth, William, Zoey, Betty, Jeri, Denise, Pastor Small, Debbie, and those we name in our hearts.* Grant them aid in this moment and, even more so, true, immortal health in the world to come. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Merciful God, You gave Your Son to be the Lamb. He has given us His own flesh to be our food and His very blood to be our drink. Give us Your Holy Spirit so that we who approach His table may receive His gifts with repentant hearts and faith, that what we receive with our lips we may keep in holy hearts and show forth in holy lives. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, Your Son promises to gather His sheep into one flock. Join us with the faithful departed from all times and places to share in the feast that has no end. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, out of Your fatherly goodness You have remembered us poor, miserable sinners and given Your beloved Son to be our Shepherd — not only to nourish us by His Word, but also to defend us from sin, death and the devil. Grant us Your Holy Spirit, that even as this Shepherd knows us and helps in every affliction, we also may know Him, trust Him, seek help and comfort in Him, heartily obey His voice, and obtain eternal salvation; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**