

**In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

**Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen**

**Third Sunday of Easter [Misericordias Domini] (2021)**

**The Shepherd Knows His Sheep**

**Rev. Toby Byrd**

***“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.” (John 10:14–16, ESV)***

Today is commonly referred to as Good Shepherd Sunday and the Gospel Reading for today invokes all those wonderful images of the twenty-third Psalm. That Psalm which begins, ***“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.” (Psalm 23:1, ESV)*** In the words of that psalm, the psalmist tells us that in His care our Good Shepherd brings us into His Church that we may feed on His green pasture and water of His Means of Grace. As we eat and drink, He cradles us in His loving arms, removing all our fear from sin, death, and the devil with the rod and staff of His Word, and Sacraments, reminding us of the words of Isaiah, who said of God, ***“He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.” (Isaiah 40:11, ESV)***

Yes, ***“Christ Jesus”*** our Good Shepherd, ***“came into the world to save sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15, ESV)*** of whom we all are, and His desire for us is only good. Leading us every day to untold joy, we walk on His path of righteousness as He continuously pours out His mercy and goodness upon us reminding us that we can run and never get weary and walk and never get faint (Is. 40:31). Living in His sheepfold is living where He desires that we dwell all our days, living in the house of the Lord. Wow! How wonderful it is to be a sheep in our Lord’s sheepfold.

But in the Gospel Reading for today, Jesus says, ***“I have other sheep that are not of this fold.”*** So not all the sheep belong to Him. There are some who have gone astray and others who have never been a lamb in the sheepfold of the Lord. Such as these are not being fed, or watered, or cared for by the Good Shepherd. Yet from the tone of His voice we can tell that our Lord does not want it to be this way. To the contrary, He says ***“I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.” (v. 16)*** Truly He, ***“desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Timothy 2:4, ESV)*** This is our Lord’s desire, to bring all the sheep of the world into His fold.

However, our Lord Jesus has ascended into heaven, having fulfilled His Father’s plan from before the foundation of the world; to save all men from their sin. Yet in ascending He did not abdicate His desire to bring other sheep into His fold. In His absence the Good Shepherd appointed under-shepherds to carry on in His place, He called and appointed apostles who in turn called pastors to not only look after His sheepfold but to seek after those who are lost or who have lost their way. In ascending to the Father, our Lord Jesus said, ***“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19–20, ESV)*** His under-shepherds are to proclaim the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins in His name and Baptize men, women, and children in the name of the Triune God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, thereby adding them to His sheepfold. Indeed, we ourselves are blessed to participate in such an addition today as Nathaniel

will be made a new lamb in the sheepfold of Christ this morning through the blessed waters of Baptism.

In those blessed waters of Baptism God the Father will adopt Nathaniel as His dear child just as He adopted you as His dear children in those same blessed waters. Therein, you were all made one with Christ, you were incorporated into His Body, the Church. The old Adam within you was drowned, and your old self was crucified so that your body of sin may be brought to nothing setting you free from sin. Now you can live with Christ by the glory of God to walk in the newness of life. As baptized children of God, you are new persons, born again, robed in the righteousness of Christ, given the gift of the Holy Spirit, the gift of faith while being cleansed from all sin to live dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 6). Living every day in communion with the Good Shepherd. Living every day as a lamb in His sheepfold. The Lord is your Shepherd, and you shall never want. Wow! Can there be anything more glorious on this earth. I think not.

Thus, this is the call of the Church, to go and make new disciples, to bring new sheep into the sheepfold of the church, baptizing them in the name of the Triune God. But to accomplish this, Christ's under-shepherds must also be "faithful" shepherds. Their call to the lost and wandering sheep must be the clarion call of God in all its truth and purity, that call which emanates from the Gospel and the Sacraments. Through these means the Holy Spirit comes, calling the lost and the wandering, working faith in their hearts and thereby convincing them of the mercy of God the Father who desires to forgive their sins and pour out His grace upon them through His only begotten Son, the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. In this way, the sheepfold of our Lord Jesus is added to. In this way, sinners lost in the barren wilderness of a sin-filled world are brought to life and salvation in Christ Jesus.

But not all hear and not all answer the call. Overwhelmed by the cares of life and the enticement of the world, some turn a deaf ear to the Good Shepherd's call. St. Paul tells us to such as these, God reveals His wrath. St. Paul says, ***"For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools," (Romans 1:19–22, ESV)***

Agnostics and atheist fall into this category, those who deny that there is a God, or those who are uncertain that there is a God. Regardless, they neither honor God nor give thanks to Him. ***"Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen." (Romans 1:24–25, ESV)***

Refusing to acknowledge God, these lost and straying sheep, these unrepentant sinners, filled with unrighteousness, covetousness, slander, malice, envy, murder, strife, deceit, gossip, disobedience, and all other manner of evil are lost in an endless wilderness of sin. Blinded by their foolishness, these lost sheep cannot find the Good Shepherd on their own. They cannot be counted among the sheep of His sheepfold. However, our Good Shepherd still desires to rescue them. Thus, He sends out His under-shepherds to proclaim God's Law, unveiling a vengeful God against the sinner. Showing them a God who pours out His wrath on sinners because He cannot abide sin. A God who judges sin and convicts' sinners, handing down the penalty for sin, death, eternal death in hell.

But before we become too judgmental, let us take a big bite of humble pie, remembering that this was once us. Many of us not only wallowed in the sins of those who are not of the Good Shepherds fold, but even now, after being brought into His sheepfold, we are still guilty of some of our past sins.

Having been rescued ourselves, we hear our Good Shepherd say to us, “Quickly, go forth to all nations and rescue as many as can be rescued. Having proclaimed the Law of God, thereby convicting many of their sins, now, go and rescue them with My Father’s never-ending rescue plan. Go and rescue them with the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins in My name.” This is the voice of the Good Shepherd instructing His under-shepherds in the task He gives. The task of bringing in those sheep who are not part of His fold. He continues, saying, “Proclaim to them the sweet Gospel truth that I, the Good Shepherd, gave My life on the Altar of the Cross to rescue them. I gave My life that they may have life abundant in My sheepfold. Bring them in and comfort them with My rod and staff, the Word of the Gospel and My Sacraments. Call them and bring them in through Me.”

Our Lord Jesus said, ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.”*** (John 10:7–9, ESV) Again He says, ***“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*** (John 14:6, ESV) The only way into the house of the Lord, into the sheepfold, is through the Good Shepherd, through Christ. He is the way, He alone has the right food for the sheep, He alone is their protector and Savior.

How wonderful it is to be a lamb in the sheepfold of Christ, and how sad it is for those who aren’t. Jesus says, ***“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.”*** (John 10:27–30, ESV) All who become sheep in the Good Shepherds sheepfold are those who hear His voice and follow Him. So it was while He was on this earth and so it is today.

Some might think what irony of ironies, the Good Shepherd and, ***“The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”*** (John 1:29, ESV) are not only one and the same, but the ***Lamb of God*** had to become the sacrificial Lamb. They think, He who rescues us, once needed rescuing Himself. But they couldn’t be more wrong. The ***Lamb of God*** did not need nor want rescue when He gave His life upon the Altar of the Cross. It was for that purpose that He came into the world. He came to become the Good Shepherd through the greatest demonstration of love every witness by man. The very Son of God willingly went to the Altar of the Cross and there shed His precious blood, giving His life for ours. Giving His life so that His call to those sheep who are not yet part of His fold could affect their rescue, that His call could indeed offer the forgiveness and salvation He so desires to give to His sheep. Oh, no, there is not irony here, only God’s plan of salvation for all men coming to fruition.

So, yes, this morning the Shepherd will add a new lamb to His fold by pouring out the Means of Grace upon Nathaniel in his Baptism. Moreover, the Good Shepherd will *Know* this new lamb just as *He Knows* all *His Sheep*. And my prayer for Nathaniel and all baptized children of God is that he and they will continue to be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Christ Jesus to the glory and praise of God (Philippians 9:11). In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.