

**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] (2022)**

**The Lord Will Seek His Sheep**

**Rev. Toby Byrd**

***“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 10:16, ESV)***

In the Old Testament Reading for today, the Lord God says, ***“Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out.” (Ezekiel 34:11, ESV)*** Then, in the Gospel Reading for today, through the voice of God’s beloved Son Jesus Christ, we hear this message again. He says, ***“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.” (v. 16)*** The Holy Father and His Holy Son witness to their desire of shepherding those whom they have called to be members of their flock while also bringing other sheep into their sheepfold that They may shepherd them in the green pastures and quiet waters of the Church: that peaceful valley in which the souls of the flock are restored as they are placed on the path of righteousness leading to the Marriage Feast of the Lamb on the Last Day (Psalm 23). Thus, our readings this morning remind us of who we are, where we are, and how the Father and the Son together intend to shepherd us to where They desire we should be. Scripture also tells us that the Father and the Son’s shepherding is through the means of the Church, the Means of Grace, that the Father and the Son will shepherd Their flock into their heavenly sheepfold. Therefore, let us pray that the Holy Spirit will open our ears and our hearts that we may truly understand how our gracious and loving *Lord Will Seek His Sheep*; how He will seek the lost saving them from the worldly dangers of sin, death, and the devil.

The biblical image of the shepherd is found throughout both the Old and New testaments, but none is more powerful than our Lord’s own confession which we heard in the Gospel Reading for today, Jesus said, ***“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep,”*** and ***“I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me.” (John 10:11,14 ESV)*** These forceful statements by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ begin with His affirmation of who He is, He is the great ***“I Am”*** the One who stood before Moses at the burning bush, who, when Moses asked, ***“If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” (Exodus 3:13, ESV)*** The pre-incarnate Christ answered, saying, ***“I AM WHO I AM.” . . . “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” (Exodus 3:14, ESV)*** Thus, Jesus attributes to Himself as the Son all those prerogatives which belong to God alone. Thereby, He asserts the equality He has with the Father, identifying Himself with the God of Israel.

Therefore, as our Good Shepherd, Jesus has the authority and the power to lead us to where He can be found, sitting at the right hand of His heavenly Father. We are assured of this because as the great ***“I Am”*** He tells us, ***“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6, ESV)*** Thus, He is our Shepherd who leads us to the green pastures and quiet waters of His Father’s heavenly home. We should follow Him with all our heart, all our mind, and with all our soul, for He alone knows the way to the Father.

Scripture also verifies our Lord’s identity as the Shepherd of God’s people. When Herod was frantically seeking the place where the Messiah would be born, he directed his Jewish scholars

and scribes to find him the answer. Searching the Scriptures, they found in the book of Micah, the prophecy of the birthplace for the Son of God. Thus, they told Herod, ***“In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: “And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.” (Matthew 2:5–6, ESV)***

Verifying Micah’s prophecy, Jesus stated that He was, ***“sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” (Matthew 15:24, ESV)*** but He also said His desire was to Shepherd more than the just the Jewish people, saying, ***“I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also” (v. 16).***

Sheep need shepherds, as the biblical images show us. In both the Old and New Testaments shepherds are those who are called by God to tend His flock; however, not one of these human shepherds is to be compared to the Good Shepherd, our Lord, and Savior Jesus Christ for some are good while others are not. These human shepherds spoken of throughout the Scriptures are under-shepherds of the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, their call is to do the will of the Good Shepherd, tending His flock in Word and Sacrament, and pastoral ministry. Thus, Scriptures has much to say regarding the work of these under-shepherds.

St. Paul gives us a great example of who these under-shepherds are and what they are to do. In his letter to the Ephesians when he says God, ***“gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.” (Ephesians 4:11–14, ESV)*** Notice, St. Paul doesn’t say one word about acclimating the flock to the culture of the day. He doesn’t say one word about the flock making their own decision about which pasture they are to feed in or what spring they should drink from. No, the flock is to be in unity, specifically, ***“the unity of the faith.”*** And how does the flock become unified? It becomes unified through the proclamation of the Word of God in its truth and purity: Law and Gospel rightly divided, leading the flock to the green pasture and living water of God’s heavenly mansion, teaching that faith in the grace of God for the sake of His Son, Jesus Christ and not works is what brings one to that pleasant valley where true salvation in Christ Jesus is given. Leading them to that pleasant valley is the calling of the under-shepherds of Christ.

The Good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ is the true fountain of life, but this truth cannot be found in worldly wisdom, it is only revealed in God’s Holy Word, specifically in the Gospel which declares the forgiveness of sins in His name. Furthermore, this truth is to be proclaimed by those whom He has called to be His under-shepherds, those who represent His Church and proclaim His Word. St. Paul declares these under-shepherds as those whose feet are beautiful for, they have been chosen to, ***“preach the good news!” (Romans 10:15, ESV)*** But, as St. Paul said in his letter to the Ephesians, it is not just those who follow in the apostles’ footsteps whose feet are beautiful, but also those who preceded them, those who proclaimed the Good News of that same soul-saving message that life and salvation are found only in the Messiah, the Son of God.

God had called the Old Testament prophets to be under-shepherds of His Son Jesus. Among them we remember Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Micah. Each of these heralds of God’s Word were called by God to proclaim His wrath upon unrepentant people, and His grace upon those who repented of their sin and sought God’s forgiveness. While proclaiming both Law and Gospel to bring the people of God into His loving hands, the prophets also pointed to the One who would come and be the Good Shepherd of God’s people.

The Old Testament Reading for today opens our eyes to the truth the God will be the Shepherd of His people. He says, ***“I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice.”*** (Ezekiel 34:15–16, ESV) God takes this position because many whom He had called to be an under-shepherd of His proved to be unfaithful. They did not feed the sheep the green pasture of God’s Word but fed their own bellies instead. Therefore, God declares, ***“Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them.”*** (Ezekiel 34:10, ESV) Rather than shepherd the flock to the food God would have them eat, these unfaithful under-shepherds led their flocks into barren and bitter pastures for food; where the sheep begin to die.

Therefore, through Ezekiel, God said, ***“And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken.”*** (Ezekiel 34:23–24, ESV) This Shepherd is not the King David of history, but rather our Lord Jesus Christ. Jeremiah makes this clear when the Lord spoke through him, saying, ***“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’”*** (Jeremiah 23:5–6, ESV)

The Lord our Shepherd, says of those who say they were called to be under-shepherds of His, but weren’t, that they did not enter the sheepfold (the church) by the door (the call of the Holy Spirit), but instead they climbed in another way and that way is worldly not divine. Moreover, He calls them thieves and robbers (John 10:1-2). They seek power, wealth, and fame and care not for the sheep. Since they are hired hands, they will run from the flock at the slightest hint of trouble, thereby leaving the flock to fend for themselves, leaving them at the mercy of the world, their flesh, and Satan. However, the under-shepherd who enters by the door, through the call of Christ, is a true under-shepherd of the sheep.

Today, as in the past, these uncaring false shepherds lead the people astray. Rather than lead them to the pure milk of the Gospel, they feed them the unhealthy and unsavory pabulum of the world. Teaching myths rather than sound doctrine, teaching, that you have the power to choose God without His call, that when you are baptized, it is an act of obedience, thereby turning the pure Gospel of Baptism into a Law which cannot save, teaching that the body and blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ is not present in, under, and with the bread and wine of Holy Communion as Scripture clearly says it is, teaching that our Lord’s Sacrament’s are nothing more than men’s foolishness, and so many other false doctrines that do not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 6:2-5) and thereby drive people away from Christ. God save us from such things.

But thanks be to God, ***“The Lord is our righteousness!”*** This Lord is our Good Shepherd, our Lord, and Savior Jesus Christ. He shepherds us today through His true under-shepherds whom He places over His flock. These under-shepherds care for the sheep, feeding them only the life-producing food of God’s Word, while leading them to the living waters of Baptism where they are folded into God’s covenant of peace, where they shall fear no evil knowing that God’s goodness and mercy are with them all the days of their life as they dwell in the house of the Lord forever: as sheep in God’s green pasture.

Through His under-shepherds today *The Lord Seeks His Sheep* calling them by His Word, sustaining them by His sacraments, leading them to His green pasture and living water of life eternal in heaven. The Good Shepherd says when He returns, He will gather, ***“Before him . . . all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left.”*** (Matthew 25:32–33, *ESV*) To those who are on His right, He shall say, ***“Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”*** (Matthew 25:34, *ESV*) But to those who are on His left He shall say, ***“Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”*** (Matthew 25:41, *ESV*) Blessed are those who are sheep on the right side of Christ, for these are sheep who lived in the valley of green pasture and the living water of God’s Word all their days, led by a true under-shepherd of our Great Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

*The Lord Will Lead, Seek, and Save His Sheep* through the true proclamation of His Word and the rightful distribution of the Sacraments. Such are His true under-shepherds are called to do, let’s get doing. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

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