

Sermon for Easter 3 – John 10:11-16

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Our Lord teaches us at the end of today's Gospel that there will be one flock and one shepherd. The one flock is His entire Church in the world. The one Shepherd is Christ Jesus. There is no other shepherd that Christ has appointed over His entire Church. There is no such position in Christ's Church as pastor of the whole Church. Jesus alone is the pastor of the whole Church. So our Lord's words are true when He says, "So there will be one flock, one shepherd."

Yet, Jesus does appoint shepherds or pastors. The men we call pastors are really undershepherds of the Good Shepherd. These men are appointed and sent by Christ to feed specific flocks. Parishes of the faithful need God's Word and Sacraments. They need to be fed. The food of the sheep is the preached Gospel and the rightly administered Sacraments of Christ. And pastors don't appoint themselves. Christ does. He does so through the call of the Church, that is, through the sheep who are gathered together. The responsibility and authority of the undershepherds of the Good Shepherd is to preach and teach God's Word – both Law and Gospel – and to administer Christ's Sacraments.

The sheep must be fed. It's the pastor's job to feed the sheep. They need the Gospel and the Sacraments. They need what the Good Shepherd preaches and teaches. What the Good Shepherd preaches is no secret knowledge available only to pastors. It's clearly taught in the Holy Scriptures. The sheep have the duty to judge their pastors. They are to see to it that their pastors faithfully feed them with the wholesome food that the Good Shepherd provides. For pastors have nothing of their own to offer the sheep. They are ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. So they must administer what Christ has given them. They must tell the flock everything that will bring on the attacks of the wolf.

For the wolf, the devil, will attack. He will snatch and scatter the flock. Christ says so. The wolf attacks the sheep by lying to them. He lies about the Good Shepherd. All false teaching is ultimately directed against Christ. But the wolf is smart. He tries to hide his true intentions. He doesn't want the sheep to know that he's attacking the Shepherd. His real purpose is to tear the sheep away from their Shepherd and scatter the flock. The wolf attacks the sheep by trying to spread lies about the Good Shepherd and His preaching.

And he does so in a number of ways. First, the wolf attacks the Gospel by making it seem unnecessary. The Gospel is the forgiveness of our sins and eternal salvation given for Christ's sake. We need this preached to us. So the wolf first attacks God's Law. Since God's Law shows us our sin and our need for a Savior from sin, the devil attacks God's Law without directly attacking our Savior. The wolf is smart. He cons foolish sheep into ignorance about how foolish they are.

You see this happen all the time. Foolish children who ignore their parents' instruction get into all sorts of trouble that brings them and their loved ones pain. They foolishly ignore the Fourth Commandment (Honor your father and your mother). They grow a little older and get into all sorts of trouble by ignoring the Sixth Commandment (You shall not commit adultery). They follow their emotions. What they call love is what God calls fornication. But because they don't recognize what they are doing as sin, they don't see any need for forgiveness. They see no need for a shepherd to lay down His life for them.

But the blatant foolishness of the young is easy to spot. You don't need to be a Christian to understand the benefits of obeying authorities and controlling one's passions. So the wolf also uses his frontal attack. The deepest and most vicious sins he orchestrates are identified in Luther's

explanation of the Our Father's sixth petition: "God tempts no one. We pray in this petition that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature would not deceive us or mislead us into false believe, despair, and other great shame and vice. Although we are attacked by these things, we pray that we may finally overcome them and win the victory."

False belief is when you believe something about God that just isn't true. Despair is when you conclude that God cannot help you and there is no point in relying on Him. Both false belief and despair come to those who do not hear the voice of Christ. Beware of these false teachings of the wolf. His lies snatch you away from the Good Shepherd who gave His life for you.

Another one of Satan's lies is turning the Gospel into the Law. Now this he does in a few different ways. Often times we hear the word "gospel" or "evangelical" used to refer to a kind, loving, or generous way of behaving. Sometimes you might hear "To err on the side of grace." But grace is never an error. Just as to "act evangelically" puts the onus of the Gospel not in God's love in dying for us, but our love for others in imitation of Jesus. Thus, the wolf attacks the sheep by turning the Gospel into a new law.

One more of the wolf's lies is turning faith into obedience. This is a subtle but deadly lie. Why? Because the conversation begins with us being saved by faith alone. That sounds good. It is good. But the wolf is smart. So he goes on to explain what faith is: making Jesus the Lord of your life. So you are saved when you totally surrender yourself to the Lordship of Jesus in absolute faith. What do you think? Have you totally surrendered yourself? Or have you held something back? Is your faith absolute? Or is there doubt? And if you held something back and if you have doubt, what are you going to do about it? You'd better get yourself some faith, because you don't have enough! And so the wolf attacks us by turning faith into obedience. When faith is taught as a surrender or commitment to Jesus, faith is robbed of its foundation and assurance in Christ. The power of faith is not faith. It is Christ and His work alone.

False doctrine enslaves those who trust in it. It's poison. It's poisonous food and polluted water for those who eat it and drink it. Yet the Good Shepherd leads His flock to lush green pastures of good grass and still clean waters that refresh our soul. What's more, the voice of the Good Shepherd is our only protection from the wolf's attacks.

Christ's sheep hear His voice. His voice is what unites us to our Shepherd. It's what unites us to one another. The voice of the Good Shepherd is hearing the Gospel preached and receiving the Sacraments administered.

Sheep are not dogs. Dogs are enticed by any master who will offer them a treat or pleasure. Sheep will only hear the voice of the Shepherd and receive from His hand. When the wolf's temptation come alluring, the Good Shepherd our salvation is procuring.

He gives His life for us. When Christ gave up His life on the cross He was fighting and winning our battle against the devil. The death and resurrection of the Good Shepherd is our victory over the wolf. When the Good Shepherd dies for us, He delivers us from death. When the Good Shepherd bears our sin, He forgives us.

Christ keeps us safe by means of the Gospel. That's the voice we hear. By forgiving our sins, Christ leads us in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. By feeding us with His body and blood in His Supper He restores our soul. By His death for us He leads us through the valley of the shadow of death and takes away our fear of dying. He changes bad into good so that our lives are filled with goodness and mercy. By Him, with Him, and in Him, we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠