

Misericordias Domini (The Third Sunday of Easter)

4 May 2025

John 10:11-16 (Ezekiel 34:11-16; 1 Peter 2:21-25)

The Good Shepherd Does it Himself

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ—Amen

The text for this morning's sermon is the Holy Gospel appointed for today from the Holy Gospel According to St. John, the tenth chapter.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit—Amen

In our Old Testament reading, the priest and prophet Ezekiel reports God's own words: "I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out." Ezekiel is preaching to the people of Israel who have just lost everything. They were conquered by Babylon. Their temple was destroyed. They were brought to a foreign land and enslaved.

In other words, God is promising to turn the redemption of sin and the restoration of His people into a "do it Himself project." If you flip back a few verses, you will see God condemning the false "shepherds of Israel," saying that they "have been feeding [them]selves. Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep."

In this context, these shepherds were the political leaders of Israel. They were supposed to take care of the people, not fleece them and take their food. The Shepherd in the Old Testament is usually a symbol of the kings. They are the ones who are supposed to keep the nation together like a flock. They are supposed to fight the enemies. They are supposed to make sure the people have access to food and water. But it is also interesting to note that the word "pastor" comes from the Latin word meaning "shepherd." We have leaders in the political world

and leaders in the church. God calls men to serve in both realms, and they should look after their flocks, not abuse their flocks for the sake of their own bellies.

So, God says, “I will come down and do it Myself.”

Those who know the Bible—both the people who heard Jesus when He first said these words recorded in our Gospel, and people who hear Him today—know that Jesus is the fulfillment of God coming down and shepherding His people Himself.

And just in case you missed it, Jesus says: “I am the good shepherd.” “I am” is the sacred name of God. To call Jesus our Good Shepherd doesn’t mean that He is nice. It means that He is a good King and a good Pastor. He leads us, and we submit to Him. He is God in the flesh, and unlike the bad leaders of church and state which we have seen throughout history, Jesus will not devour us. Instead of sacrificing the people for His own comfort, He sacrifices Himself for our comfort. “The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.” This is the opposite of Israel’s bad shepherds. This is the opposite of false prophets and ungodly pastors—who don’t care about the sheep.

This is where Jesus points out the differences between the “hired hand” and the true shepherd, the one who cares for his own sheep. When trouble comes—as in the case of a wolf, a predator, one who wants to devour the sheep—the hired hand will simply run away. He has no skin in the game. He is only there because it is a job. He is a president or a senator or a mayor who is just there to collect a check. He will be out of office soon, and can live the good life. The sheep will be someone else’s problem.

The hired hand only became a pastor because he figured this job would be easy—one day of work a week, not digging ditches, not really having to care about his flock. And if he plays his

cards right, he can get a call to a rich church, or become a well-paid bureaucrat. And then he can retire in style and lead tours of the Holy Land.

Jesus is our Shepherd. Unlike our politicians, He is our good King. Unlike our ambitious pastors and TV preachers who pressure you to send them money, Jesus fights the devil for us. Jesus is our King—whether we live in a republic or a totalitarian state. His kingdom is not of this world, because His kingdom is a better world. And we are all His subjects, members of His flock. He calls us to Himself, because, as our Good Shepherd says, “I know My own and My own know Me.”

And St. Peter reveals a bit more about what it means that Jesus is our Good Shepherd. In our Epistle, which is Peter’s first letter, the apostle writes, “You were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.” In the Latin language that our churches used for a thousand years, people heard Peter’s words as they were intended: “You have now returned to the Pastor and Bishop of your souls.”

We all know that Jesus is Prophet, Priest, and King. He is the Lamb, the Sacrifice. He is God in the flesh. He is our Lord, Savior, and Redeemer. But He is also our Pastor and our Bishop, dear friends. For just as we have earthly fathers, and yet we have God as our heavenly Father, and just as we might have an earthly king, but Jesus is our heavenly King, so also we have pastors and bishops, but Jesus is our heavenly Pastor and Bishop.

Earthly fathers serve as representatives of their heavenly Father. Kings of this world serve by the authority of the King whose kingdom is not of this world. Our pastors and bishops shepherd us here in the church on earth, serving as servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, the “Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”

Jesus is not a hireling. He is not afraid to lead us in battle. Jesus doesn't send us to fight while He stays in the palace feasting and enjoying Himself. Jesus leads from the front. This is why St. Peter calls us to "follow in His steps." We follow Jesus, walk where He walks (that is, to the cross), fight whom He fights (namely the devil, the world, and our sinful nature), love whom He loves (our brothers and sisters in the church), and we carry out the work that He calls us to do (whether preachers, hearers, fathers, mothers, children, leaders, citizens, and all other callings), always following, always being gathered by our Good Shepherd, whom we know to be our true King and Priest.

For "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." And this is exactly what God meant when He said, "I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out." Jesus sought us out at the cross, and He finds us, because He knows us by name. He delivers us from our slavery to sin and from our exile in the foreign land that is this world. He will never flee from you, dear brothers and sisters. He will never allow the wolf to devour you. He will stand and fight for you. He is our Good Shepherd, the "Shepherd and Overseer" of our souls. He is our God who has come down and done it Himself. He went to the cross for you. He rose for you. In Him, doing it Himself, you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit—Amen

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus—
Amen

Sermon based on one by the Rev. Larry Beane