

**Misericordias Domini (The Third Sunday of Easter)**  
**19 April 2026**  
**John 10:11-16 (Ezekiel 34:11-16; 1 Peter 2:21-25)**

**Of Sheep and Shepherds**

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

+Alleluia, Christ is risen! [He is risen indeed! Alleluia!]+

The thread which connects our readings—and even several of our hymns—today, is the relationship between shepherds and sheep. The relationship of human beings and sheep is one of mutual benefit. Men use the products of the sheep for clothing and warmth, and sheep enjoy the protection and intelligence of a human caretaker to keep the herd intact, fed, watered, and out of harm's way.

The domesticated sheep and their human caretakers are, perhaps, a little window into the Garden of Eden, when all creation lived harmoniously, without sin and violence—even though the representation is far from perfect. The little window is broken and foggy and discolored—but we can still see the shadows of the former perfect world by squinting and imagining.

The readings on this third Sunday of Easter have been the same for centuries, so that it is called not only "*Misericordias Domini*" after the opening words of the Introit in Latin, it is also called "Good Shepherd Sunday"—because of the Gospel reading and the other readings as well.

Jesus takes up this theme of the shepherd-sheep relationship and uses it as a metaphor for Himself. And in doing so, He is building on the Old Testament Scriptures, like the prophecy we heard in Ezekiel, where God says: "I Myself will search for My sheep and I will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered." Sheep, you

see, live in flocks, or communities. If they become scattered for some reason, they are vulnerable to predators. Ezekiel prophesies about God's people being scattered. When we are living among unbelievers and cut off from meeting with one another, we are vulnerable to being attacked by the devil, the way that a wolf lurks about for scattered and lost sheep.

So, God promises to come Himself and gather those who are scattered.

And He promises not only to "seek the lost" but also to "bring back the strayed" and "bind the injured" and "strengthen the weak" and to destroy the ones who have taken advantage of the others. "I will feed them in justice," says the Lord.

All of this is, of course, a reference to the coming of Jesus. God's people have been scattered. Because of their disobedience, they have strayed from the truth. And so, they are weak, and they have been vulnerable to being downtrodden by others—some from their own nation, others from occupiers. And God promises to restore that which is broken.

This is why Jesus says, "I am the Good Shepherd." He is calling to mind passages like our reading from Ezekiel to reveal His mission. He "lays down His life for the sheep." That is also what a shepherd does: he interposes himself between predators and the sheep under his care. And it is a risky business. A shepherd can get hurt. He can even die. But, of course, a hired hand is not going to die for someone else's sheep. He will run away, and if the sheep get eaten or scattered, well, he would rather preserve his own skin. But not the Good Shepherd, not Jesus, who fights to the death for His sheep. In fact, He does something no other shepherd in history has ever done: He becomes a Lamb. He is born as one for whom He cares. And what's more, because we don't live in Eden, but rather in a world of sin and death, sheep serve another purpose for humanity: sacrifices. The Lamb is sacrificed at the Passover, remembering the people of God being spared death. Sheep are sacrificed to make atonement for the people. The scapegoat had sins placed upon it and it was left to die.

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, becomes the “Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.” The Shepherd is also the sheep, the Priest is also the offering, God is also man, the Eternal One is also capable of death.

This is the extreme nature of the Lord’s plan to rescue His sheep. This is what Ezekiel’s prophecy means that God promises to save His sheep Himself. And when the Good Shepherd “lays down His life for the sheep,” He doesn’t merely risk His life fighting the wolf, He allows Himself to be killed by the wolf, being sacrificed by sin so as to conquer sin, being put to death to vanquish death, being bruised in the heel by the serpent in order to bruise the head of the serpent.

And this is how Jesus, the Good Shepherd, comes to restore the Garden of Eden. And though the bloody work of the cross is done, and though He has risen from the dead, He continues to shepherd us until He returns to re-create the universe anew and to raise us from the dead in a new Garden of Eden.

This is what St. Peter means when he writes: “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 now have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”

And it was Peter whom the risen Jesus restored to the office of the ministry when Jesus asked Peter to, “feed My lambs,” “tend My sheep” and “feed My sheep.” Jesus continues to do the work of shepherding the flock through His called servants, who in a lesser way (a much lesser way), lay down their lives for the sheep.

The word “pastor” is Latin for “shepherd.” And the Lord shepherds His flock using them as His servants, His ministers. Pastors feed the little lambs by baptizing them. They tend the sheep by preaching the Word to them. They feed the sheep by administering the Holy Supper to them. And the Good Shepherd says: “There are other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them

also, and they will listen to My voice.” This is the work of evangelism, of the other metaphor of St. Peter’s work as a “fisher of men.”

The work of the shepherd can be both violent and tender. We see King David in his youth slinging rocks which are lethal even to the Philistine giant. Shepherds must fight off lions and wolves by means of their own bodies and whatever weapons they have at hand. But shepherds are also gentle toward the sheep, binding up their broken limbs, stopping their bleeding, keeping little lambs safe in the fold of their mothers, making sure the older sheep do not get left behind. The sheep come to know and trust their shepherd, knowing his voice, and the shepherd’s entire existence revolves around keeping the flock together, bringing them to water, and finding good grazing fields for their sustenance and health.

Jesus is still shepherding the flock, dear friends, for He is still our “*Bonus Pastor*”—our Good Shepherd. His promise to seek us out, rescue us from all places where we have been scattered “on a day of clouds and thick darkness,” and to bring us out from among the hostile peoples where we find ourselves—is still His ministry among us.

Jesus still gathers us in the church, waters us with baptism, feeds us with His Supper, and protects us from the wolf.

And so, we do well to remember His promise: “I know My own and My own know Me” and “So there will be one flock, one Shepherd.”

And we do well to “listen to [His] voice”—His voice which tells you that you are forgiven for all of your sins.

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

+Alleluia, Christ is risen! [He is risen indeed! Alleluia!]+

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