

Pastor Kenneth Mars

St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Misericordias Domini (Third Sunday of Easter)

April 18, 2021

Text: John 10:11–16; I Peter 2:21–25

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Good Shepherd Sunday and last Sunday, the Second Sunday of Easter, are beautifully linked together through the imagery of shepherds. This is certainly true for today's service. All three readings appointed for today use the imagery of shepherds clearly and powerfully. But what about last Sunday and the reading from John 20? It was about the fearful disciples locked behind closed doors on the evening of the first Easter Sunday. And who could forget about Thomas and his need to see Jesus with his own eyes and touch the crucifixion marks in the Lord's hands and side. What does John 20 have to do with shepherds? They aren't mention even once! Nor is there mention of shepherds in last week's Old Testament and Epistle readings.

The issue is more of a language problem surrounding the word shepherd. The word pastor is the Latin word for shepherd. In John 20, the resurrected Jesus established the pastoral office, the shepherding office, when our Lord appeared to the disciples.

Listen John 20:19b–23:

[Jesus said:]^{19b}“Peace be with you.”²⁰When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”²²And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”

The pastoral office, the shepherding office, was established by the risen Christ for the purpose of gathering His precious, blood-bought sheep around the preaching of the forgiveness of sins. Every church service is a gathering of Christ's sheep around our Lord's gifts of inspired Scriptures, prayers, worship, Holy Supper, and mutual encouragement. The Lord Jesus established the pastoral office, the shepherding office

so that all that the victory of His resurrection would continue to come among His people.

When you call me “pastor”, you are saying at least two things. First, you, Pr. Mars are my shepherd placed in my life by Christ the Good Shepherd. And when I hear that word, I am reminded that Jesus is the chief shepherd who cares and nourishes His flock. Every pastor is in truth an under-shepherd. A man placed into the shepherding office by the Good Shepherd and Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. The sheep, you Christians belong to Jesus. That is a most important fact that none of dare forget. We belong to Jesus because He purchased us from the domain of darkness, death, and sin by His own precious blood.

Second, Pastor, your primary task is to preach the holy and precious gospel of the forgiveness of sins. For through it, we hear the voice of the Good Shepherd saying, Peace be with you. Whenever you call me pastor you are reminding me what I am to be about: preaching Jesus and His gospel. Keep that front and center, pastor. Preach, live, model, and talk about Jesus as His is revealed in His Holy Word. Stay focused on who Jesus is and what He did to save us, His beloved sheep.

So let’s clear the air once and for all about why you guys call me pastor rather than reverend or something like that. It’s not because I deserve special recognition or honor. Quite the contrary, I am to be your servant, your under-shepherd. You calling me pastor is reminder to me and to yourselves that says, Kenneth, be who Christ the Good Shepherd called you to be and do what Christ has called you to do. That’s why you’re here. Preach the gospel in season, out of season; when you’re tired and when rested, encouraged or discouraged. During epidemics and recessions, prosperity and boom years, times of peace or war, in times of persecution or quietness. Pastor, be like Jesus who gave His life for the sheep. You can’t atone for our sins, only Jesus can do that. But you are to preach the Good Shepherd’s gospel. Pray for and intercede on our behalf. Call us by name with the living voice of the Savior. Baptize us and our children. Feeds us the body and blood of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. For that is what He commanded in His last will and testament to be done until He comes again. Lead us in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Constantly speak the wholesome words of Christ’s gospel. And by all means, don’t be a hireling who runs away at the slightest sign of adversity, trouble, or spiritual oppression. Even if we ourselves are part of the trouble. We are sheep after all. The prophet Ezekiel, in chapter 34, described God’s sheep as lost, straying, injured, weak, jostling about against one another, poking and prodding each other. Call us to repentance. Work so that peace, love, and

reconciliation abound in the congregation. This, and much more, is what you are saying when you call me “Pastor.”

There is one thing that we need to keep straight, however. The Lord Jesus Christ is your Good Shepherd, your Good Pastor. This is the claim He makes in John 10:11, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” Do you notice what criterion is for Jesus being the good shepherd, the good pastor? He lays His life down for His sheep. Jesus didn’t run away when opposition from Jewish leaders and authorities grew. As they were arresting Him in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus did not abandon His sheep. Let them go, He said to the soldiers. I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you seek. Even before Pontius Pilate, Jesus did not turn aside from the crucifixion being threatened against Him. Never once did He deny who He was, the Son of God, the King of Israel, come to redeem His people. Nor did He despise the suffering, the scourging, the mockery, or finally, even His Father’s wrath He had to endure on the cross to make atonement for our sins. Jesus is the Good Shepherd because He laid down His life for the sheep.

Such is the apostle Peter’s reflections upon what Jesus accomplished in His Passion and death. From today’s epistle reading, I Peter 2:22–25:

²²He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. ²³When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten ...²⁴He 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. ²⁵For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Christ Jesus Himself bore our sins because He loves you, His sheep. He is the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls (vs. 25). This too, we must always remember. Jesus carried your sins to His cross and made atonement for them. Why, for heaven’s sake, do we try to carry around our sins? It’s as if we are trying to snatch them away from Jesus and say I’ll take care of that. What I’m describing is the guilt and shame we carry around for the sins we have committed and those committed against us. To be sure, we remember our failures. And we mourn because we are sinners. And we sinners do really crazy bad things that don’t make any sense. And yet, the Lord Jesus has taken all of those sins and carried them to His cross. His blood covers them all, every last one of them! By that cleansing blood, we are healed, says the apostle Peter (vs. 24), who is really quoting the prophet Isaiah 53:5.

Healing is found in the Lord Jesus Christ. That certainly includes spiritual healing. Once we were dead, but now are we alive in Christ Jesus. The life we live now in the flesh we live by faith in the Son of God. But the healing also includes emotional, mental, and physical healing. The entire person, body and soul, is healed through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Peter wrote that Jesus died on the tree “that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed” (vs. 24). The purpose of Christ’s death was to bring healing to the sheep. Dead to sin. Alive to God in righteousness. By His wounds we have been healed.

On this side of eternity, we continue to struggle against the devastating effects of sin in our lives. The day-to-day experiences of life are always trying to drive us away the healing we have in Christ Jesus. The pain, the lies, bitterness, disappointment, suffering. They all try to silence the healing voice of the Good Shepherd, Jesus. But Jesus will not allow it. Come unto Me all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light. The Lord Jesus has already done the heavy work of atoning for your sins. He’s the Good Shepherd. Because He gives us healing from sin, we, by His grace, run away from sin. Sin brings death and evil. We are now alive to God in righteousness.

This is why we need the public gathering of God’s flock around Word and Sacraments. Remember John 20 from last Sunday and which began this sermon? As the Father sent Jesus to atone for the sins of the world by dying and rising again, so now the resurrected Jesus sends forth His under-shepherds to proclaim the forgiveness of sins in His name until the end of time. The Lord Jesus knows you, His sheep. “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” (vs. 14–15).

Dear saints of God, you are the precious sheep and little lambs of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the good shepherd. Tune your ears and your hearts to His voice. To you, He speaks words of truth and love authenticated by His death and resurrection. You belong to Jesus! He is the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

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

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.