

Sermon for Misericordias Domini 2015

Collect Prayer of the day: *Almighty God, merciful Father, since You have wakened from death the Shepherd of Your sheep, grant us Your Holy Spirit that when we hear the voice of our Shepherd we may know Him who calls us each by name and follow where He leads; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*

The Word of the Lord for this sermon is taken from John 10, 11-16:

^{ESV} 11) I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

12) He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.

13) He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

14) I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,

15) just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.

16) And 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.

Prayer: Come Holy Spirit, open our ears, enlighten our minds and shepherd us with Your living voice! Amen.

Dear congregation in Christ!

☪ Today is Good Shepherd Sunday on the liturgical calendar. The Latin name for the Sunday was Misericordias Domini, which has a nice ring to it even if you don't understand a lick of Latin. The merciful heart of the Lord. And there is probably no greater picture of the merciful heart of the Lord than the picture of the Good Shepherd carrying the wayward sheep on His shoulders.

☪ Many of us grew up with that little children's hymn we learned in Sunday school: *I am Jesus little lamb; Ever glad at heart I am. For my Shepherd gently guides me Knows my need and well provides me Loves me every day the same Even calls me by my name.*

☪ If we think we've outgrown that little song, we need to spend a little quality time with the image of Jesus the Good Shepherd. We may have grown from little lambs to big sheep, but we're just as much in need of a shepherd.

☪ "I am the Good Shepherd," Jesus says. This is more than a nice little figure of speech for the children. It's a solemn revelation of who Jesus is. When Jesus says, "I am" the way the Gospel writer

John gives it, that comes fully loaded with the sacred name of God in the Old Testament. I AM is the content of the name Yahweh – I am who I am. The name revealed to Moses in the burning bush, the name by which God's people walked to freedom, God's covenant name, the name no pious Jew, then or now, would say, lest he take the name of God in vain. When Jesus says, "I AM," it's much more than metaphor. It's revelation.

● I am the Good Shepherd. The prophets said that Messiah would come to shepherd God's people. When the people heard Jesus say, "I am the good shepherd," their minds would immediately lock into of Psalm 23, the song of David, who knew a thing or two about sheep, having worked as a shepherd before he was king. He takes the part of a contented sheep boasting about his shepherd. "Yahweh is my shepherd, therefore I lack nothing." And now here is Jesus, God in the flesh, saying, "That's me. That's who I am for you. I am the good shepherd of which David and the prophets spoke."

● We usually associate Psalm 23 with funerals and the part about walking through the dark valley of death. And that's fine, but in a way that's too bad. Psalm 23 is not about death but about life. Life under the care of God the good shepherd. It reads like a job description of all that God does for us in Jesus.

● He comforts us – makes us lie down and rest in green pastures. Jesus said, "Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." He refreshes us – leading us beside the cool, quiet waters of Baptism, a spring of living water that flows from the cross of Jesus to you. He forgives us – restoring our souls, picking us up when we fall, setting us on our feet again. He guides us in the way of righteousness. "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." He brings us to the Father. "No one comes to the Father except by me." He accompanies us on the journey through the darkness of death and on to resurrection and life. "Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." He comforts us with His Word, His rod and His staff. He feeds us, preparing a table in the presence of our enemies – sin, death, the devil. He gives us His own body to eat, living Bread come down from heaven. He gives us His blood to drink, wine from heaven to bring us joy and life. He anoints our heads with the oil of gladness, He pours out the Spirit so that our cup overflows.

● It's all about Jesus, and how by His own death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead, He has gathered us up like a flock of sheep under His care, and we are blessed by Him. Blessed to the point where the blessings overflow to those around us like a cup spilling over its the brim.

● I am the good shepherd. Jesus goes on to define what that means. "I know my sheep and my sheep know me." He knows you. Better than you know yourself. He knows you. Your strengths, your weaknesses, your fears, your sins. He knows you the way a builder knows the house he built. The way a shepherd knows each one of his sheep and calls them by name. He is the Word that made you, that called you into existence in your mother's womb, that holds you in existence even now. You

are known deeply, down to the depths of your soul.

● Sheep are a high maintenance animal. Psalm 23 demonstrates that. Shepherds are busy people. That's the flip side of this image. Jesus is the good shepherd; we are sheep. Stubborn, straying, sometimes mean and thorny. We butt heads with each other, we bully the weak. We are sheep who hurt each other and hurt ourselves. We like to munch on poison weeds of religion and drink from polluted puddles of spirituality. As independent as we like to think we are, we follow the leader, and if that leader isn't the good shepherd, we'll follow the leader to our own death and destruction. The prophet Isaiah said, "All we like sheep have gone astray, everyone has turned to his own way, but the Lord has laid on Him, His servant, the good shepherd, the iniquity of us all."

● The good shepherd is a suffering, dying, and rising shepherd. He lays down his life for the sheep. That's what makes this image so wonderful. Not the hard working shepherd tending his flock, but the shepherd laying down his life for the sheep. When the night came, and the sheep were in their pen, the shepherd would lay down in the doorway, the opening of the pen. There he would sleep. If anyone or anything wanted to get to the sheep, he would have to get to the shepherd first.

● Think of the cross of Jesus as the doorway. He lays down His life for His sheep, for the world. He lays down in the door of death, and then He rises in the morning of the resurrection to lead His sheep into the green pasture of life. He's not some hired hand, some flunky who runs off at the first sound of danger. He's the good shepherd. He's fully invested in the sheep. He is authorized by the Father to lay down His life and then to take it up again, and to take us along for the ride. Dying and rising in Jesus.

● In Baptism, we're seeing Good Shepherd Jesus in action, naming and claiming another one of His sheep. He brought us to the quiet waters of Baptism, to the green pastures of His church. He washed us in that birthing, cleansing water that restores our soul. Born from above, born anew, child of God, sins forgiven, anointed by the Holy Spirit. Our cup runneth over.

● Baptism is often misunderstood today. Many view Baptism as something we do to show everyone that we believe in Jesus. In that case, baptising children makes no sense, because we have no idea what, if anything, they believe. But Baptism is something God does; it's done in His name, not ours or the church's. God gives little children something to believe in and to trust every day of their life. Sure, they have to be taught, just like we open a trust fund for our children and then teach them about money and how to use it. Disciples are made by baptising and teaching, and so little children are baptised into a lifetime of teaching. They learn who they are and who Jesus is for them.

● Some would suggest that we should let the babies decide from themselves when they get older. But that's not how God saves us. Sheep don't choose their shepherd; the shepherd chooses the sheep. We don't make Jesus our Shepherd and Saviour, He is our Shepherd and Saviour by His laying

down His life for us and by His rising to life. He didn't consult us when He died on the cross that Good Friday. "Do you want to be saved? Have you decided to follow me?" He did it.

● *Lost sheep don't seek the shepherd, the shepherd seeks the sheep.*

● Life under Good Shepherd Jesus isn't necessarily easy, or happy, or free of pain and trouble. We have no special immunity from disease, doubt, depression. We have no monopoly on miracles. We all must walk through that dark valley of shadow of death, with its steep, threatening cliffs surrounding us. There are no exceptions. But you needn't fear any evil. Good Shepherd Jesus has gone ahead of you, and He is with you.

● There are two things you can be sure of. Goodness and mercy will follow you like a couple of sheep dogs all the days of your life. There will never be a day that goes by, whether good or bad, when goodness and mercy won't be yapping at your heels, reminding you that you are forgiven, you are died for, you are a sheep in the flock of the Good Shepherd.

● And of this you can be certain, as certain as crucified Jesus is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity: Baptised in Him, trusting Him, you will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

● The Lord Jesus is your shepherd, you lack nothing. **Amen.**

● Let us pray: *Dear Lord, we thank You for being our Good Shepherd, for finding us and embracing us with Your Word of mercy and grace. We praise You for saving us poor sinners and for making us sheep of Your flock.*

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **Amen.**

Kurt Schnackenberg

Shelly Beach