

## SOUL SHEPHERD AND OVERSEER

He is Risen!

Hear again the Word of God for this third Sunday in the season of the Resurrection of our Lord,

*For into this all of you were called, because Christ also suffered concerning all of you, leaving behind (a) copy for you, in order that all of you might have been followers upon His footprints.<sup>1</sup>*

**Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**

A traditional nickname for this Sunday of the Church Year is, “Good Shepherd Sunday.” Now, if you are going to compare notes about that which is proclaimed here with that which may be spoken in other Lutheran congregations, you should know about some contemporary practices. If such congregations follow any lectionary at all (some unfortunately have adopted neo-evangelical “pop-christian” traditions), a good number of them will celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday next week. (Such congregations likely follow a modern three-year lectionary, wherein all the Sunday readings are not designed to fit together).

On the other hand, for centuries, dating back before the Reformation of the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, in congregations like this one, this has been the week after Easter given to the Church in which we remember our soul Shepherd and Overseer, Jesus the Christ. Readings, hymns, liturgy, and the Church’s confession continue to declare the price He paid to bring back the Father’s wandering sheep. They are the people of God who have been saved by grace through the Faith. From the Psalm which not a few of you have

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<sup>1</sup> I Peter 2:21.

memorized, through Ezekiel's prophecy, to Jesus' words concerning Himself and His sheep, into the Christian life which follows the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, the Church declares Christ-crucified. We continue to do so, century in and century out, for those who, in themselves, have nothing to commend themselves to God. Therefore, as you have heard repeated, St. Peter's words for today regarding the Good Shepherd, Jesus the Christ, begin:

*For into this all of you were called, because Christ also suffered concerning all of you, leaving behind (a) copy for you, in order that all of you might have been followers upon His footprints.<sup>2</sup>*

Into what have you been called? St. Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, makes clear the answer in that which precedes that statement. There he declares the Christian's calling in this life, stating: *this is commendable: if on account of conscience toward God someone bears up under grief, [while] suffering unrighteously.<sup>3</sup>* (Think for a moment how some in our culture might view us Christians and our biblical attitudes toward "Mother Earth," on this pagan, secular, Earth Day holiday. We know this world is passing away. We do understand our calling to be stewards of this fallen world. But we do not believe that our efforts will forestall the coming of the Last Day when all of this will pass away in a rush of fire. Will society pardon us for not making "green," or "blue" our foremost priority in this life? God, through His Word, has placed our eyes, ears, and thoughts on that which endures). A good part of the Christian life that Good Shepherd Sunday is given to declare is this: Christians will suffer on earth on account of

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<sup>2</sup> I Peter 2:21.

<sup>3</sup> I Peter 2:19.

maintaining a clear, good confession of the Faith and holding a right conscience toward God. Scripture declares that which comprises such a clean conscience (συνειδησις):

- *we conduct(ed) ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God.....<sup>4</sup>*
- *we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.<sup>5</sup>*
- *[we have] a true heart in full assurance of the faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an **evil conscience** and our bodies washed with pure water...<sup>6</sup>*
- *we have a **good conscience**, in all things desiring to live honorably.<sup>7</sup>*
- *there is also an antitype which now saves us – baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a **good conscience** toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>8</sup>*

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, you continue to be called by God *on account of conscience toward God [to] bear(s) up under grief, [while] suffering unrighteously...* God has given His power to you to do so, through....? The water and Word of Holy Baptism; that which you are free to return to each day, as you recall all that God has done for you in that washing. The voice of the Good Shepherd continues to call out to those whom He has washed as His flock. They are you who would be and remain the bearers of the Name of the Good Shepherd. You continue to be given the power of Christ to endure grief, while suffering wrongly,

*because Christ also suffered concerning all of you, leaving behind (a) copy for you, in order that all of you might have been followers upon His footprints.<sup>9</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> *II Corinthians 1:12 NKJV.*

<sup>5</sup> *II Corinthians 4:2 NKJV.*

<sup>6</sup> *Hebrews 10:22.*

<sup>7</sup> *Hebrews 13:18.*

<sup>8</sup> *I Peter 3:21.*

<sup>9</sup> *I Peter 2:21b.*

“Hey,” you may be thinking, “you began the introduction to this sermon with ‘He is risen!’ and you have been dwelling on the Good Shepherd’s and His sheep’s suffering on account of having a good confession before God.” Well, while we are in the Easter season, we are bound by the good confession from the pure conscience of our Good Shepherd to not separate atonement from justification in the proclamation of God’s Word. While we might be able to academically separate the death of Jesus from His resurrection, we cannot, must not, and will not (by God’s grace) theologially divide them in proclaiming the Jesus of the Bible.<sup>10</sup> To declare Christ’s resurrection without His atoning sacrifice for our sins, and the sins of the whole world, is to declare half a Christ. The same writer who declares:

*For all of you were as continually wandering sheep,  
but you have been returned now by the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls...<sup>11</sup>*

precedes that with today’s theme verse:

*because Christ also suffered concerning all of you, leaving behind (a) copy for you, in order that all of you might have been followers upon His footprints.<sup>12</sup>*

The suffering Christ is not a good sell, even in the Church, neither in the New Testament era nor in the Old Testament age. People throughout all times want to hear of the glory of the end of the story without hearing the gory details which come at the beginning of the story and which stand for eternity. As were the ancient faithful in the Church, we are living among people – who are sitting in churches – who want little to do

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<sup>10</sup> I heard another sermon this week which declared joy and glory for Christians in the wilderness of sin, without declaring the One who died to free us from sin’s desert... how sad.

<sup>11</sup> *I Peter 2:25.*

<sup>12</sup> *I Peter 2:21b.*

with the suffering of Christ; and everything to do with His healing miracles, His raising of the dead; His imminent return in glory.

Yet, those were not the realities which Jesus emphasized during His incarnate earthly ministry. He used those good things to emphasize how He would declare God's people good. Today, you heard Jesus' central message, the message of the cross, when He said, *the Good Shepherd His soul lays down for the sheep... and the life of Me I lay down for the sheep.*<sup>13</sup> When Jesus first declared those words of death, His death for His people, there was heard much the same reaction we get today from those who are not accustomed to hearing of Christ-crucified for the forgiveness of their sins as the central message of Scripture. They divided, asking, "What does this mean?" Some declared Him to be insane, others, demon-possessed... and then, later, some tried to stone Him to death for not being the Christ they wanted.

Look here, right here, to the front of this pulpit. Is this the Jesus you desire? If not, repent! Believe that this image represents God's central message to all sinners, of whom I am the chief in this era, and you are one with me! This lifeless icon bears forth in detail, while sanitizing some of the reality - no bruises, blue joints, dirt, abrasions, and full nakedness of God in our flesh are here - yet this cross with a body of wood depicts the Good Shepherd as Jesus saw Himself, as the Father sees you as you in the Faith, His Faith, cling to Him. Behold the gory glory of God,

*Who, for our sins, bore them up in His Body upon the tree,  
that we, having departed from sins,*

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<sup>13</sup> *John* 10:11b and 15b.

*we might have lived for righteousness;  
by Whose bruises that bleed all of you were healed.*<sup>14</sup>

Make no mistake: *we crucified Him with our sins.*<sup>15</sup> Christ Jesus bore the full fury of God's wrath at sin, and at sinners, as He hung humanly helpless on the wood of the cross. He did so, that when He washed them from you, by His blood, in the washing of Holy Baptism, that you may believe, and know, that in His death you have departed from sin's hold upon you. His death covers over your sinfulness, and His resurrection frees you to live right before the Father, now, and in eternity. Because you are one with Christ in His death, you are one with Him in His resurrection.

That means that the life you live after Baptism is one which follows the life of Christ. And, that brings suffering for the good, beautiful, pure confession of the Christian Faith. This is what comes in this mortal life from following Jesus: suffering after Him in His confession of the Faith. Have you ever been punished for doing something good? There is a modern saying, "no good deed goes unpunished." Often those who quote it seem to be blaming God.

Yet, Jesus the Christ, who held the good confession until the end of His mortal life, before his human nature was clothed fully in immortality, Jesus, did not blame God even while He was bearing all the punishment we deserve. He held fast to the promises of the Father, even when it meant He had to die for you.... Because Jesus did that for you, and you are one with Him, you are free to suffer unto death to self for

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<sup>14</sup> *I Peter 2:24.*

<sup>15</sup> Luther, Martin. *The Lutheran Study Bible*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009. 2153n.

Him, and for others. This you are free to do, that you, and others, might hold a good conscience: in simplicity; in sincerity; in God's grace; renouncing hidden shameful things; handling the Word of God in truth; holding a true heart in the Faith; remaining cleansed by God of an evil conscience; desiring to live honorably before God and your fellow humans.

All that, the world and the devil will hate. All that will bring suffering. Yet, even in our suffering on account of holding a good conscience before God, *we are still far from suffering what He suffered.*<sup>16</sup> Therefore, when you behold images such as this with your eyes, when you hear the central proclamation of His death in yours sins, you are free to know that you, through God's work in you, are freed *to travel in the footsteps of the LORD and have compassion on those who harm you* for the sake of the good confession of Christ-crucified.<sup>17</sup> After all, those who persecute you for the right confession of the Faith are actually doing more harm to themselves – by rejecting the Truth – than they possibly can do to you. They may strike you with words, pummel you with human reason, even slap your face on account of Christ, but, they cannot harm your soul, even as they seal theirs into eternal on-going destruction. Think about this: when Christ was suffering on the tree, in your sins, and the sins of all mankind of all ages, what did He cry out regarding those who nailed Him to the tree? *Father, forgiven them, for they know not what they do!*<sup>18</sup> These remain the words of He,

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Luke 23:34, RSV.

*Who, sin did not do, and neither was deceit found in His mouth. Who, continually being vilely abused, did not return abuse; continually suffering, He did not threaten, but handed Himself over to the One continually judging justly...<sup>19</sup>*

Those are the footsteps in which you, dear Christians, are being called to follow. They are not showing you how to handle all life situations. The Word of God, simply and clearly, gives you hope in the crucified and risen Christ for those situations in which you may find yourself on account of maintaining the good confession of the Faith. On this Good Shepherd Sunday, as one of God's flock, do you really want to follow Christ's example pure, as one of the old hymns declares? If so, know that the one *who wants to imitate Christ insofar as He is an example must first believe with a firm faith that Christ suffered and died for him.*<sup>20</sup> May that be ever true for you!

**The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus**

Resurrection III (LSB One-year series)

Psalm 23; Ezekiel 34:11-16; I Peter 2:21-25; John 10:11-16

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*Paster Michael A. Morehouse*

**SOLI DEO GLORIA**

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<sup>19</sup> *I Peter 2:22-23.*

<sup>20</sup> Luther, M. 1999, c1968. *Vol. 29: Luther's works, vol. 29 : Lectures on Titus, Philemon, and Hebrews* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works. Concordia Publishing House: Saint Louis