

“Those Other Sheep” John 10:16

Easter4B 4-22-18

As the Good Shepherd Jesus laid down his life for the sheep. He did not just step in front of our body to take a bullet for us. No, He stepped in front of God’s punishment for our sin. As we sang earlier, *on that cross as Jesus died, The wrath of God was satisfied -For every sin on Him was laid; Psa 49:7 “no man can ransom another, or give to God the price of his life”*. Christ alone could do that and did. Then He took up his life again to show that His death was the only punishment God required for all sins and all sinners.

John Piper says that while the hired hand loves his life more than the sheep, the Good Shepherd loves the sheep more than his life. That’s why we love to say, “The Lord is My Shepherd.” All that He does, He does for me: Heals my wounds, finds me when I am lost, protects me from my enemies, feeds me grace, comforts me in the shadow of death, and brings me into heaven forever.

This is all very comforting. It is also a little dangerous, in that we can focus so much on My Shepherd that we lose sight of Our Shepherd. We can easily ignore those other sheep that Jesus has--believers who with us are one flock with one Shepherd.

I was talking to a mom Friday as she was holding her new infant and asked how the baby’s big brother accepts him. “Wonderfully” she said, then described how he helps care for his little brother and how mom and dad were not forgetting his needs.

It is true that when our emotional needs are met, we will meet the needs of others. That is true with families, coworkers, friends, and churches. The mother’s baby is like the “other sheep”, the new or different Christian that demands attention and care. Since we have a Good Shepherd in whom lack nothing, we are as secure as this infant’s big brother. We can be diligent and devoted to loving those other sheep in the church.

Jesus referred to Gentiles who come into the Church. The first Christians were Jews who debated the requirements placed on Gentiles wanting to join the church. They decided only that they did not have to observe Jewish laws, but that the moral laws must be kept.

Today we are tempted to impose requirements on new believers. Not about their life or faith, but from our own personality preferences. We want them to be like us, or at least to be likeable.

Yet Christians that don’t score high on our likeability scale are in the same flock as we. The same shepherd died for their sins and loves them as intimately as he loves us. Each one rightly confesses, “The Lord is *My* Shepherd.”

Christ has different folds, but not different flocks, many congregations and denominations, but one Church. Paul refers to the Jewish Church in Romans 11 as just one tree into which the Gentiles are grafted. There is not another tree. In Ephesians 2 he calls the Church a household out of which God creates “*one new man in place of the two so making peace*”.

So what does this mean for the flock called Faith Lutheran Church? First of all, it means that we know that the Shepherd is the one that leads people into the sheepfold. Luther wrote that the Holy Spirit, “*calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth*”. Your pastors past, present and future are not the only people called to this flock. God called each of you here for a purpose and with gifts to use for His glory and your growth in faith. And who else He will call is not your choice or mine. God chooses whom He wills, as He did us. Many sheep, one Shepherd.

Secondly, those who are not like most of the sheep in this fold, we respect and accept, even with all their differences. They may speak, appear, and vote differently than you. But faith in Christ unites us. All true believers are equally righteous in God’s sight, because for all Christ died to make righteous. We are to look not at external differences, but at the internal unity of the Spirit.

Thirdly, we accept the other sheep where they are. We acknowledge that all of us are at different points on our path to spiritual maturity, and it ends only at heaven’s gate. As we challenge each other to grow in grace and holiness, there is no reason for a superior attitude by those who are more mature in their conduct and knowledge. We are all fighting battles against our flesh that war against our Spirit, and with varying degrees of success. We all need the Shepherd’s daily guidance and protection.

Many flocks, one Church. Many sheep, one Shepherd. The Lord is Our Shepherd and their Shepherd. For all he gave His life. For all he rose from the dead to save. With the love and grace of the Good Shepherd meeting all our needs, we are free from want. We can love Christ’s other sheep. Amen.