

St. Peter Lutheran Church
April 19, 2026
Third Sunday of Easter
John 10:11-16

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

God had put shepherds over His flock in times past who were to speak His Word to the people. He gave prophets. But these prophets had not always been faithful in their tasks. Israel was a rebellious people, and the prophets often would speak peace when there was no peace in order to avoid their own downfall at the hands of the people. They were not faithful to the words God had given them to speak but spoke words of their own imagination. This was to the detriment of God's people—who needed to hear God's truth, even when they didn't want to hear it. Though it was easier for the prophets to scratch their itching ears and say what they wanted to hear, this was bad both for God's people, and the prophets who were to be caring for them.

They were also forceful with God's people, driving them violently instead of leading them gently. Striking them not only with God's commandments but with rules of their own, laying a burden on the people which they could not bear, instead of pointing the people to God's promised salvation in His Messiah. The Law is good and wise, but when preached to sinners for righteousness, leaves them beaten and defeated, for they cannot fulfill it. The sweet knowledge of where one can obtain such righteousness demanded by the Law is the consoling Gospel of God, which the shepherds often failed to deliver.

God, through Ezekiel, promised that He Himself would shepherd His sheep. The hirelings didn't cut it—He would do it Himself. This is a promise of Jesus, God with us, who has become man to be with His people and shepherd them Himself. **God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds.** He, Jesus, who is Lord and God—He is the Good Shepherd. He only speaks truth, for He cannot deny Himself. He does not say what people want to hear, but what they need to hear. He does not violently drive the sheep as a taskmaster to works which the sheep cannot fulfill. His yoke is easy and His burden is light. He leads His sheep by His own righteousness and the joy of His salvation. He never puts His needs about the sheep. He always gives of Himself for their good. He does not shy away from speaking the truth, even when it jeopardizes His welfare. **When He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed *Himself* to Him who judges righteously;**

This Shepherd, Jesus, cares for His sheep entirely, giving all, even His life for them. He sees the wolf coming and does not flee but faces him, in order to protect us. He sees death coming for us, He hears the devil claiming victory over us, He knows our sins which condemn us, and He takes those sins to Himself—He **Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. He lays down**

His life for the sheep. He is the Good Shepherd. He alone was able to save us by His death. The prophets couldn't do this. Preachers can't do this. Therefore He and He alone is the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls—all others are hirelings, unable to save us—Christ alone is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep.

Having laid down His life for our sins and risen from the dead, He continues shepherding us. He knows us and we know Him. He has called us by name, and we are His. He's washed us in Baptism, joined us to His death for our sins, and raised us to newness of life. He speaks His word to us still. He has us lie down in green pastures and feeds us. He feeds us not just food that lasts for today, but food that endures to eternity—His own risen flesh and blood. He lives and reigns now to all eternity, and we who share in His life through faith will too. He gathers us out of all the nations in which we have been scattered—He brings us out of all the dark and gloomy places our lives of sin have been—He seeks what was lost and brings back what was driven away, binds up the broken and strengthens what was sick. He fixes all our ills. We know Him by His voice—His voice that tells us that in Him we saved—not by any other, not by works, not by anything but Him. And He knows us as the ones who hear His voice.

The Good Shepherd does this work in His Church through hirelings, preachers, ones who do not own the sheep but serve the Good Shepherd and act in His stead. They have not purchased the sheep with their own blood as the Good Shepherd has. They are his mouthpiece and instrument, they are good insofar as they bring Christ's voice to the sheep. They cannot take on the wolf themselves—they too need the Good Shepherd. But these hirelings are shepherds—their name derives from the word for shepherd, and they do shepherd, but only in subjection to the Good Shepherd. Faithful preachers will not demand trust in themselves but trust in Christ and His word. Christ's word, and not their own, they will set before the people, that they may hear the voice of the Good Shepherd. Faithful undershepherds are to take Christ as example in giving of himself for the good of the flock, willing to give even their life for the flock.

Sadly, there are unfaithful hirelings who don't emulate the Good Shepherd. Pastors do not always put the needs of the people above their own needs. They do not always speak what needs to be said, but fall prey to saying the things that make them popular and life easier. They avoid persecution instead of enduring it. They at times scatter when trouble comes, even as the apostles did when the Shepherd was struck. But even when these unfaithful hirelings speak God's Word and administer Christ's sacraments, this ministry is just as valid and certain as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself.

So Jesus emphasizes not the relationship of the sheep to the pastor but the sheep to Himself. He knows His own and His own know Him. They hear His voice and they follow. They don't follow the man preaching, for he is but an instrument of Christ—they follow Christ. They know when Christ is speaking and they listen. They know when a stranger is speaking, and they don't listen. They test the spirits, and follow only their Lord. And their Lord never disappoints them, even as men can and do.

Christ is the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls—both of those who preach and those who hear. Only He could take on the wolf of death and the devil, and lay down His life to save us. This He has done. And He has risen and speaks His victory to us and leads us and delivers us from all evil. He is the Head of the Church. The ministry belongs to Him. The forgiveness given in the Church depends on His sacrificial death, the absolution spoken is at His command, the sacrament of the altar depends on His words and institution. By His ministry in the Church, He gathers a people. He said to His disciples that He had sheep who were not of this fold and that He would gather them too. And indeed, not only those Jewish disciples and the Jews who received Him have Him as Lord—this Gospel is preached to all the nations, that all His sheep may hear His voice. People are brought together in Him who would otherwise not have been associated. Dividing walls of hostility are broken. There is one flock and one Shepherd. There is one Church and one Lord. Amen.

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