**1 Peter 2:19-25 May 3, 2020 (Good Shepherd Sunday)**

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

Our text for this morning comes from our Epistle lesson, 1 Peter 2 here re-reading these words. “He 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. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Have you ever been in a large department store when they make announcements on the loud speaker? Nowadays, if you spend any time in the store you’re probably just moving as fast as you can to get in and get out, but there is usually some sort of communication going on. Usually the announcement is related to the workers looking for help at the cash registers or about a spill somewhere. I still remember one time when I was in the toy aisle of a Meijer store and I heard booming out throughout all the store, the loudspeaker that announced “Will Jacob Sherry please come to the front of the store? Your parents are waiting for you. Jacob Sherry to the front of the store.” I didn’t realize I was lost at the time, but when I made my way to the front of the store, my parents were both relieved and of course, angry that I had wandered off on my own. Perhaps you’ve had a similar situation, losing a child in a crowded store, being the lost child in a mall or large event and the joy and anger that comes from finding the one who had strayed and bringing them back into the fold.

Of course, as you get older you understand the feelings that your parents had when you were lost. Your mind goes to the worst possible scenario. Usually lost items aren’t recovered, and this is especially true with animals. I can still remember the remarkable story of how my brother and sister in law’s dog had been missing for months, and one day just showed back up at the house. He wasn’t hurt and just rejoined the family. I remember thinking that the farm cat in Indiana where Jess and I were staying was dead when it stopped showing up at the house for food, only to see it one day outside the neighbor’s house. It wasn’t lost, it was just getting fed more often. Those are the happy stories of the ones who strayed, we like to imagine that they have found a new home, that they are happier there than they were here and are living out the rest of their lives in peace. We had two black rabbits when we lived in Kansas, and before we moved we came into the garage one day and found that they had escaped. We looked all around the house, but they were gone. We like to imagine that situation, that they went off on their own and had adventures and in a way are living “happily ever after” out in the wild.

But that image of happiness outside of protection, isn’t a realistic one. This isn’t true for the sheep who went astray, and any good shepherd knows it. Sadly, an animal that has gone missing, is no doubt dead. There are many dangers for animals without protection, and for sheep without a shepherd. The sheep could have died of starvation or thirst, unable to find a proper place to graze or still waters to drink. A sheep could have wandered and injured itself, left to die from its wounds of falling off a cliff or even just breaking its leg. Chances are the sheep was caught and devoured by predators, the natural enemy of the sheep that wants to cause chaos and confusion to bring the sheep away from the protection of the Shepherd, the watch dogs and the other sheep and devour it when it is on its own.

Jesus said. “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” He is the perfect lamb of God, and also, as we are celebrating and remembering today, even in the midst of another week of isolation and quarantine, He still remains The Good Shepherd of the Sheep. And while many times we look at the protection and love of the Good Shepherd of Psalm 23, the one who protects and provides for his sheep and brings them through the valley of the shadow of death, this particular Good Shepherd Sunday focuses on John 10 which is a revelation of Jesus Christ as the door. The singular door, meaning the only door, and thus a continuation of the teaching that Jesus is the only way to salvation. All those who get to the sheep come through Christ, unless they are there to hurt the sheep or steal from them.

My parents were upset with me when I strayed, because they were worried about what would happen to me on my own. They were upset because they cared about what happened to me. The thief doesn’t, the robber will leave you on the side of the road to die. So, we see the difference between the Good Shepherd Jesus, and the thieves and robbers of this world, the enemies of our faith led by the influence of our greatest adversary, the devil. Satan wants nothing more than to scatter, to question, and to destroy. When Satan calls and we recognize his voice, he is powerless. Jesus himself says. “A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” When we remain in fellowship and the protection of the Good Shepherd, Satan’s lies, and deceptions are immediately destroyed.

So why does Peter say “For you were straying like sheep.”? Or Isaiah saying “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned – every one – to his own way” Here is the reality of our lives as sheep. When we remain in God’s Word, in His presence, when we are blessed to be in his house when all of this is over, but even when we remain in worship, albeit virtually or through text like you may be reading right now, when we remain in various ways in the fellowship and help of the Shepherd, the watch dogs, and the rest of the flock, that’s when the strangers are sent away and the lies of Satan called out. But when we stray, and follow the desires of our hearts, tainted with sin, and our minds influenced by the world around us, which says that the flock is meaningless, and the watch dogs want to hurt you, and the Shepherd doesn’t know anything about the contemporary problems of a modern society, and that the world is harmless, that one time of this, and one day of that, won’t matter in the long run, that’s when we stray, and are scattered. The shepherd leads us through this valley of sorrow, but there is no promise that the road will be easy, or that every place that we go will be filled with happiness. Peter reminds newly converted Christians saying “For what credit is it if when you sin and are beaten for it you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.” The shepherd leads, and the sheep follow. Jesus makes this clear. “When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.” As Christ suffered, we will suffer. As Christ won salvation for all people, dying in their place, he dies for you and therefore you are saved through him, but that’s not to say that life will be easy.

The Good Shepherd makes this clear, He comes that you may have life and have it abundantly, an eternal and continuous life, not a promised life of happiness here on Earth. No, that is the promise of the thief and the robber, who comes to distract and destroy. Who comes with promises of happiness and prosperity in so long as you give money to them or you do good deeds thinking you can earn salvation. The thief and the robber will tell you anything that you want to hear as long as it benefits them, and when you are brought low, when you are scattered and alone, when the predators of the world have surrounded you, when you have no food or drink, when you are injured, they will abandon you for their own gain. That is the theology of glory here on Earth, it isn’t what the Good Shepherd has clearly taught us, it is instead the lies of a world tainted with sin.

Christ is the door of the sheep. In one sense it can be thought of as a means of keeping the sheep in, but also we should see it as the means by which the predators, the thieves and robbers, are kept out. He is the door, we come to salvation only through him, and in fellowship with him, no one comes to us except those who have come through Christ. It is a great responsibility and blessing to be called to be an under shepherd of Jesus Christ, to be the guide and overseer of your souls by preaching this Word of God, the words of the true Good Shepherd even in the midst of a pandemic and preaching them by printing them, and administering the Sacraments, by appointment, so that you have an opportunity to still receive the body and blood of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. These are the means by which the Good Shepherd has fellowship with you. The Good Shepherd works through His Church, protecting and providing, caring and loving for all sheep, those who are in fellowship with Him and those who have strayed. For the Shepherd has laid down his life for them all, his sheep and also, his friends. “You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide.” Here is another title, another name, and another way to see the love that Jesus has for you. It is appropriate to call Christ our friend, for not only does he care and provide, but he loves us. He lays down his life for us, as any good shepherd would for the needs of his flock.

As any good friend would do for those that they love. And so I ask you, do you know of any wandering sheep? Have you been wandering in the wilderness of this world in need of the love and protection of The Good Shepherd; Jesus Christ? Some would say that the responsibility to find the lost sheep lies only with The Good Shepherd, as we see in the parable of the lost sheep how he leaves the 99 and goes out, finds the lost one, puts that sheep on his shoulders and brings them back into the fold. While this is the evidence of God’s love for the lost, let us together as the fellowship of believers, reach out to those who have strayed, reach out to those who are lost and show them that they are loved and cared for by God their heavenly Father. This can be done even in a time of social distancing, because of the blessings we have in communicating via the internet, the phone, or even just sending someone a letter. Let us work together as under shepherd, and watch dog, and flock and all find the lost and those who are in need to remind them of the love that Jesus Christ has for them and for ourselves, as he lays down his life to save the entire flock of the world.

Though we have strayed, he has found us, and he shows his authority over sin, death and the power of the devil by being the door of us, the sheep. What an amazing truth and teaching, for us to remember every day, as we go out into the wilderness, led by our Good Shepherd, led through the valley of the shadow of death, disease, and the unknown, led by one who has authority and power, the very King of the world, but also the King of Love, who also is our Good Shepherd.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.