Misericordias Domini: Easter III “A Shepherd”

18 April 2021 Rev. Joshua Conradt

 Grace, Mercy, and Peace be unto you from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Alleluia Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed, Alleluia! It is still Easter after all, for another four weeks. So, when someone randomly wishes you a good day, do what I do, say Happy Easter and watch them be totally confused. But the joy of a Christian at the resurrection of our Lord, should make us full. We should tell out from the tops of mountains that our Lord has conquered death. Not just for Himself, but for each and every person who would believe on His name and in His word. That’s the Jesus that we are learning about today. The Jesus that is proclaimed each and every Sunday here at St. Peter’s Evangelical Lutheran Church. Today is commonly referred to as Good Shepherd Sunday, and when you look at our readings for today it is easy to see why. Our Old Testament lesson, our Epistle lesson, and Gospel lesson, all talk about Jesus as Shepherd and that we are His sheep.

 The Psalm for today Psalm 23, is a Psalm that many of you know by heart. A Psalm that you have heard at many a funeral. But a Psalm that should not comfort you only at death, but all the days. “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.” If Jesus is the Shepard who guides us, then how can we be anxious about anything. He leads us, He restores us. He prepares for us a table in the presence of our enemies. The Lord gives you His very Body and Blood given and shed for you, for the forgiveness of your sins.

 We like to think of Jesus, the Good Shepherd only in that image (the one at the front of church). Only this beautiful image of this Man looking lovingly down with a little lamb in His arms. But when we look at that image, we might also sometimes forget what is in Jesus’ other hand. A crook, what does a Shepherd need a crook for? Well keep in mind that in Psalm 23, these words are there and I think we forget about them. ‘Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me’. God is our Father, and like a good Father He doesn’t simply let us do whatever we want. Because if we would simply do what we want apart from new life in Jesus, we would be lost in sin. And, so He uses a crook, a rod, and a staff as a father must do from time to time, to discipline his children. A good father does not allow his children to do whatever they want, whenever they want, there are rules, and there are consequences. It’s not because our Father desire to be a rule monger, rather it’s because He loves us. He doesn’t want us to hurt ourselves and hurt others and at times that crook is used to grab around the neck of a sheep to keep them on the right path. At times discipline must be given so that we follow our Shepherd. The Good Shepherd.

 Jesus said I am the Good Shepard, I lay down My life for the sheep. What does a good Shepherd do when he sees wolves attaching his sheep, he does not abandon them, but he defends them. He stands in the stead to defend them. He keeps them on the good and right path, he feeds them, not what they always want, but what they always need. Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd. The word pastor is Latin for Shepherd. That’s all the word pastor means, and I am not that Good Shepherd, I am not that chief Shepherd. Rather pastors are what are called Under Shepherds. He has placed you His flock, in the care of your pastor, and sometimes I say things that you might not like, and when that happens, I ask you to search the scriptures, and if you can prove to me that I am wrong or that what I have proclaimed is not correct according to God’s Word, then I will take that rebuke. But search the scriptures, that is what we are bound to, not what makes you feel good, not what makes me happy, but God’s Word.

 Too often, our modern society I think we loose sight of how true God’s Word is and how firm of a foundation it is. It would be easier in the short run to simply go with whatever our society and culture says. But in the long run, we stand before Jesus Christ as Judge, we must give an account for our deeds, our words, and our actions. Sometimes people will ask me about the office of Pastor, and today’s Catechism recitation is a great opportunity for us to look at some of those passages right now. So, I’m going to ask that instead of at the end of the service we are going to look at it now.

 The Catechism for the week, we are starting on the Table of Duties. The Table of Duties are the Bible passages that Matin Luther put together to talk about each different section. So, what does God’s Word say to Bishops, Pastors and Preachers, “The overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well, and see that his children obey him with proper respect. He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine, and refute those who oppose it.“

 There are some pretty hefty requirements that God lays out for pastors. It’s not the easiest job and many of you, if not most of you don’t have easy jobs. It is a job where you say things that not everyone wants to hear. It’s a job that you take on because God has placed you in it. It’s a job that gives joy, there is great joy every time a person passes through the waters of Holy Baptism that God uses His pastors to do that.

 There are other passages including from Acts chapter 20: “Therefore, take heed to yourselves and to all the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to shepherd the Church of God which He purchase with His own Blood.” It would be easier in the short run for me to simply say, *you do whatever makes you happy,* but I have to answer to God for that, and so the harder path is laid out. A question that is often asked is why we in the Missouri Synod and many of the ancient churches ordain only men. So, I want to spend some time looking at that question today, why does the church only ordain men?

 There is some tradition here, in the Old Testament when God set up His Priesthood, He set aside only the sons of Aaron, and then only the sons of the tribe of Levi. If we go to the New Testament, Jesus picks twelve men to be His Apostles. His sent ones that would preach, and teach, and administer His Sacraments.

 Ephesians 5, refers to this relationship between Christ and His Bride. Christ is the Bridegroom, who lays down His Life for His Bride: the Church. A woman cannot stand in the stead of the Bridegroom, it is incompatible. There are other passages which speak about authority, not only in the Church, but in the world, and the office of Pastor is one of those pieces of authority. It is not my desire, it is not the Church Council’s desire, or constitution’s desire, or our Synod’s desire, to do whatever we want, rather we are bound by the very word of God. Listen to some of that today.

 Much of this flows for the Order of Creation. That God made Adam first and then Eve, that headship is given to him. From II Timothy 2, “Let a woman learn in silence with all submission, and I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence, for Adam was formed first then Eve and Adam’s was not deceived but the women being deceived fell into transgression, Nevertheless she shall be saved in child bearing, if they continue in Faith, Love, and Holiness, with self-control. “

I Corinthians 14, “For God is not the author of confusion but of peace. As in all the Churches of the Saints, let your women keep silent in the Churches, because they are not allowed to speak, but they are to be submissive as the law also says. And if they want to learn something let them ask their own husbands at home, for it is shameful for women to speak in Church.”

I Corinthians 11, “Now I praise you brethren that you remember Me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you. But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. Every man praying or prophesying having his head covered, dishonors his head, but every woman who prays and prophesies with her head uncovered, dishonors her head. For a man indeed had not to cover head since he is the image of the glory of God, but women is the glory of man. For man is not from woman, but women from man. Nor was man created for the women, but woman for the man. For this reason, the women ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, never the less neither is man independent of women, or women independent of man in the Lord. For as women came from man, even so man comes through woman, but all things are from God.”

Titus 2, “But as for you speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine. That the older men may be sober, reverent, sound in faith and love and patience. The older women likewise that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things, that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands that the Word of God may not be blasphemed.”

 It’s not that women are incapable, it’s that God has not given them to do and be certain things, and the same is true for men. Women are incredible gifts from God. They have roles given by Him and when they are done it is a blessing. Men are also a gift by God. Created in Him for specific roles. When men and women acknowledge each other and the complementary aspect of our relationship between male and female the Church and our Society run better. When men do their jobs women don’t have to do both roles.

 Patriarchy is not set up by fallen men, patriarchy was set up by an ordered God. A God who does not desire chaos. A God who desires order. Let the role that God has given you flow forth from you. Recognize that you are a blessing, not just as God has made you for yourself but for one another. The order of creation is important.

 Again, as I said Pastor’s will say and sometimes do things that not everybody necessarily likes. And today I want to spend just a little bit more time talking about one of those things. *Chanting*. The Lutheran Church continued the historic practice done by God’s Church from its inception. That is that pastors and their people sang a responsive liturgy. Some pastors chose not to do that. But many choose to do that throughout history. So CFW Walther, the first President of the Missouri Synod back in the mid nineteenth century saw that there was some discussion about whether or not chanting should be done in the Lutheran Church. And he said this “Whenever the Divine Service once again follows the old Evangelical Lutheran agendas or Church works, it seems that many raise a great cry that is Roman Catholic. Roman Catholic when the pastor chants “The Lord be with you” and the congregation responds by chanting “And with thy Spirit”. Roman Catholic when the pastor chants the Collect, and the Blessing, and the people respond with a chanted “Amen”.

Even the simplest Christian can respond to this outcry. Prove to me that this chanting is contrary to the word of God, then I too will call it Roman Catholic and have nothing more to do with it. However, you cannot prove this to me. If insist on calling every element in the Divine Service Romish that has been used by the Roman Catholic Church, it must follow that the reading of the Epistle and Gospel is also Romish. Indeed, it is mischief to sign or preach in Church, for the Roman Church has done this also. Those who cry out should remember that the Roman Catholic Church posses every beautiful song of the old Orthodox Church, the chants, and antiphons, and responses were brought into the Church long before the false teachings of Rome crept in. This Christian Church since the beginning, even in the Old Testament has derived great joy from chanting.

For more than seventeen hundred years Orthodox Christians have participated joyfully in the Divine Service. Should we today carry on by saying that such joyful participation is Roman Catholic, God forbid. Therefore, as we continue to hold and to restore our wonderful Divine Services in places where they have been forgotten, let us boldly confess that our worship forms do not tie us with the modern sects or with the Church of Rome. Rather they join us to the one Holy Christian Church that is as old as the world and is built on the foundation of the Apostles’ and Prophets.”

Walther went on to say, “It is truly distressing that many of our fellow Christians find the differences between Lutheranism and Roman Catholicism in outward things. It is a pity and dreadful cowardice when a person sacrifices the good ancient church customs to please the diluted American denominations, just so they won’t accuse us of being Roman Catholic. Indeed, am I to be afraid of a Methodist who perverts the saving word, or be ashamed in the manner of my good cause, and not rather rejoice that they can tell by our ceremonies that I do not belong to them. It is too bad that such entirely different ceremonies prevail in our Synod. The prejudice especially against the responsive chanting of pastor and congregations is of course still very great with many people. This does not however, alter the fact that it is very foolish. The pious Church Father Augustine “Qui cantat bis orat” “He who sings prays twice”.

 Chanting may not be your preference, but I think it is safe to say there is precedence even in the Lutheran Church of this to be a practice. And St. Peter’s has had pastors before me that did exactly that. During the season of Easter, we sing all the more, because our joy in our hearts full with this rejoicing. And what happens when the heart rejoices, she sings.

 On this day 500 years ago Martin Luther took a stand, a stand in front of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. He was told that he must recant for what he had written and I think his words are important not just for pastors in today’s world, but for every Christian. For when the world attacks you for what you believe, you give this confession.

 “Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures, or by clear reason, for I do not trust ither in the Pope or Councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves, I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I can not do otherwise, here I stand may God help me. Amen”

The Church sings “In death’s dark veil I fear no ill, with thee dear Lord beside me, Thy rod and staff, Thy comfort still, Thy cross before to guide me” (LSB 709:4). Amen.

The peace of God that passeth all understanding keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.