

Willow River Parish

Title: The Lost Sheep and the Good Shepherd

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24; Matthew 25:31-46 (NRSV)

¹¹ For thus says the Lord GOD: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. ¹² As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. ¹³ I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the watercourses, and in all the inhabited parts of the land. ¹⁴ I will feed them with good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and they shall feed on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord GOD. ¹⁶ I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice.

²⁰ Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD to them: I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. ²¹ Because you pushed with flank and shoulder, and butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you scattered them far and wide, ²² I will save my flock, and they shall no longer be ravaged; and I will judge between sheep and sheep.

²³ I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. ²⁴ And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken.

Matthew 25:31-46 (NRSV)

³¹ “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³ and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴ Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸ And when was it that we saw you

a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' ⁴⁰ And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' ⁴¹ Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; ⁴² for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' ⁴⁴ Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' ⁴⁵ Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Good morning Church! As the year is coming to an end, big holidays and church events are coming to us. Thanksgiving Eve service is going to be offered at First Lutheran Church in Clear Lake on this Wednesday at 7PM. They are planning to offer In-Person worship as well as Online worship. And, our annual Christmas cookies and baked potatoes sale will be held with curbside pick up on December 11th. I cannot wait to taste them. And, our annual Charge Conference is December 3rd, next Thursday at 6PM. And, Diane and Debi are preparing for Christmas for Children. If you haven't signed up for the donation list, I hope you will do soon. Also, on Thursday, Dawn set up Salvation Army bell ringing at Nilssen's market and many members rang bells in Clear Lake. Heather is making pictures and videos with children for the Christmas program. I was surprised by their excellent directing skills. I'm really looking forward to watching it. In the program, my son, Evan, took the role of baby Jesus, so my family and I went to Heather's home to join in the pictures this past Thursday afternoon. While there, we met Gracie dressed up as Mary and Ben dressed up as Joseph and children. When Evan was held in Mary's arms, he cried out of shyness, I bet even baby Jesus cried!

At Heather's farm we got an opportunity to see many animals: dogs, cats, chickens, and horses. I don't remember that there were goats. After visiting her house, I wondered if other church members are also raising many animals like her. I have seen many cats and dogs, but I haven't had many opportunities to see horses and chickens in person. My mother's parents' home was five hours away by train from Seoul where I was born and grew up. It was a rural area so there were a lot of rice paddies. I was able to see rabbits, dogs, chickens, an ox, and bees at their home. When I was a child, I used to like catching frogs in rice paddies in Summer. When I brought frogs to my

father, he often said that he used to eat frog's back-legs. Do you also raise various animals at home? What kind of animals do you have? I know Paul is raising sheep. I have never raised sheep and I'm not an expert on sheep, but the image of the shepherd with the sheep is very familiar.

The scripture reading we read today is about the good shepherd. Most Christians have good images about the good shepherd. There are two famous Bible verses: In Psalm 23:1, David confesses that "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." In John 10:11, Jesus says that "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." In the Bible, a shepherd and sheep often appear. Moses said this with concern for his people: "the congregation of the LORD may not be like sheep without a shepherd." (Numbers 27:17, NRSV) And, when Jesus saw a great crowd, he had compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. (Mark 6:34, NRSV) One of the most widely known in early Christian art is the "Good Shepherd." The shepherd in the painting is a young shepherd looking for a lost sheep.

For persecuted Christians in the early church, the painting of the Good Shepherd gave them faith and hope that the resurrected Jesus Christ would find and save them. Their faith helped them overcome their difficult situation. Most of the works about the Good Shepherd were made based on the parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15:4-6. The parable tells the truth beyond common sense. What would you do if you had 100 sheep and lost one of them? Our common sense is to protect 99 sheep. There is something called utilitarianism in ethics. Utilitarianists argue the greatest good for the greatest number. Many people follow utilitarianism and think it is reasonable. So, it may be a reasonable choice to protect 99 sheep rather than to go out to find a lost sheep. /However, Jesus did not, and he made the decision to leave to find the lost sheep. What does the parable of the lost sheep mean?

The lost sheep of the parable is not just one. For Jesus, the value of a sheep and 100 sheep are the same. The shepherd left to look for the sheep because the owner knew that the lost sheep needed urgent help and care. Like that, the LORD listens to the prayers of those in need of urgent help and is with them. According to prophet Nathan's words in 2 Samuel 12:3 (NRSV), "the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought." For the poor, one little ewe lamb was a daughter and everything they had. Through the parable of the lost sheep, we can get a hint about the righteousness of God. The Good Shepherd is always accompanied by sheep and he protects his sheep in a moment of crisis. A good example is the shepherd boy David. According to 1 Samuel 17:34-35 (NRSV), "David said to Saul, 'your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and whenever a lion or a bear came, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth; and if it

turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down, and kill it.” But not all shepherds were good like David. Ezekiel 34:3-4 describes a bad shepherd, “You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fatlings; but you do not feed the sheep. You have not strengthened the weak, you have not healed the sick, you have not bound up the injured, you have not brought back the strayed, you have not sought the lost, but with force and harshness you have ruled them.” The bad shepherd indicates Israel’s top leaders at the time. The Bible judges the shepherds leaving to find a lost sheep as good and the shepherds who do not care for their sheep as bad.

In Ezekiel 34:11-12 (NRSV), The prophet confesses that God is the only good shepherd: “For thus says the Lord GOD: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness.”

The Good Shepherd, Our God, promises: “I will bring them into their own land...I will feed them with good pasture...they shall lie down in good grazing land.”(13-14) “I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice.” (16) It is like David’s confession in Psalm 23: The LORD is my shepherd...

The reason the good shepherd risks his life to protect his sheep is because he knows them. The knowledge that a shepherd knows sheep means a deep relationship. Likewise, there is a deep, personal relationship between Christ and the Christians. God says He will judge evil shepherds. God also promises to protect vulnerable sheep from ruthless evil shepherds. The judgement is based on God’s justice. Jesus Christ, who will come in the future, is the good shepherd. This Thursday is Thanksgiving Day and Advent starts next Sunday. We have time to thank God for the grace we have received from God so far, and we have a desire for the Messiah to come as the good shepherd. The Lord is our good shepherd. The Lord, who does not give up a lost sheep, never gives up on us, but wants to take care of each of us, one by one and meet us. We must take care of the neighbors around us, thanks to the great love of the Lord. We must take care of the very small and the weak around us and convey the love of the Lord, just as the good shepherd left to find a lost sheep. If we don't take care of them, who will take care of them? In the name of the Lord, I hope we will pray for friends, family, and neighbors who are suffering from Covid-19 and give a helping hand to those in need in the cold winter. In addition, I earnestly pray in the name of the Lord that the grace of God, the good shepherd, may allow us all abundant lives. Amen