

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

The portion of Scripture before us today is found in the Old Testament book of the Prophet Ezekiel the thirty-fourth chapter beginning at the eleventh verse:

'For thus says the Lord GOD: "Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. ¹² "As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day. ¹³ "And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land; I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, in the valleys and in all the inhabited places of the country. ¹⁴ "I will feed them in good pasture, and their fold

shall be on the high mountains of Israel. There they shall lie down in a good fold and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ "I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down," says the Lord GOD. ¹⁶ "I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick; but I will destroy the fat and the strong, and feed them in judgment."

Heavenly Father, sanctify us by the truth; Your word is truth. Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

Next to the Last Supper, I wonder if there is a more widely known picture within the Christian church than one of Jesus as Shepherd carrying the sheep on His shoulders. It is a picture that resonates with each and every one of us when we consider the words of our Gospel lesson this Sunday.

Jesus proclaiming that He is THE Good Shepherd. Not one of many. Not the first one and others will follow. Not even an average one and the greater one you get to see later. No, Jesus is THE Good Shepherd and He has come to call His sheep into one fold.

And the same is said for the lesson before us today. God promises that He is our shepherd and He will bring His people back together. He will call them, He will mend them, He will do everything for us; and we know this is true because *The Lord is our Shepherd*.

Though the Lord is our Shepherd, we must confess that we are indeed like sheep... and not in the most positive way at all times. Like sheep we wander away from our shepherd. Like sheep we get afraid and run from our shepherd. Like sheep we go places that are not right for us to go. Like sheep we are easy prey for that lion, the devil.

As Peter tells us in his first epistle, Satan is “*walk[ing] about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.*” And Satan is seeking us out and at times we are all too willing prey. Peter, in the same letter, tells Christians, “*For you were like sheep going astray...*” And does that not sound like us?

How many here today have ceased to sin since Easter Sunday? How many of us have tried to consciously reduce the amount of sin that is in our lives... at least the more blatant and seen sin? How many of us have sought the help of God in all situations and not just called on Him when it is expedient and as a last resort?

Throughout our lives we sin and we sin mightily, and when we sin we are walking further and further from God. As Luther reminds us in “The Bondage of the Will,” we are like a beast of burden and either God is

in control or satan is... and we must ask ourselves who is in control? Who is the one calling out that we are listening to?

Are we listening to God or satan when we get upset about how other people choose to live their lives, when nothing they do goes against God's word? Are we listening to God or satan when we watch that movie or listen to that music or read that book? Are we listening to God or to satan when we continue to give in to sin and serve it?

You see, like those sheep, it is very easy for us to stray also. We hear the tempting voice of satan and off we go. We do not, so much, as give a second thought to God and His word when we hear the tempting and 'sweet' voice of satan luring us away.

And yet, here again, God in His word is telling us that He will call out to us... and He is doing just that. God is calling out to us

in His word and through His shepherd. he is calling out to us and pleading with us that we would listen to His voice and come back to Him.

For like a sheep, without God calling us back we would not even be inclined to come to Him. Without God calling us back we would continue to wander away, further and further from our Lord and Savior. But when He does call out for us; when He raises His voice and lets out that distinct and memorable call; when He calls us by name... then we know, for sure, that God is calling out to us and He is calling us home.

And Jesus Christ, that Good Shepherd of the sheep is indeed calling out to you until this day. He is calling out to you reminding you of all that He has done and paid for each and every one of us.

Your shepherd, Jesus Christ, lived the perfect life for you. He lived in perfect obedience to God's law. He did everything that we cannot and He did it for us. Your shepherd, Jesus Christ, also suffered for you. Though He is the Good Shepherd, He was harassed and mocked and beaten by those who did not want to hear His voice. Jesus was hung on a cross for all of your sins. He was hung there to suffer and to die.

Yes, Jesus Christ, your Good Shepherd, died for you and for many. He died for all the sheep of His fold. He died to make full atonement for all of your sin, all of my sin, all of the sin of the world.

And three days later Jesus Christ rose from the dead. He rose to proclaim that His life and death were sufficient payment for all sins of all time of all men. He rose to make sure that we all know that He is our Good

Shepherd, the Shepherd who laid down His life for His sheep.

And now He stands to this day calling out to us. He is calling to all of His sheep, the sheep that listen to His voice, He is calling to them. And He feeds us and cares for us as only He can.

He feeds us in His word where He provides the life giving nourishment that only the word of God can offer. He feeds us with the promises declared to us: the forgiveness of our sins, the hope of eternal life with Him, and the assurance of peace with God our Father in heaven.

He feeds us with His flesh also. In the Lord's Supper Jesus gives us His very body and blood... yes, the shepherd offers to His sheep His very body for the forgiveness of all of our sins. He also offers us the very

blood that flow through His veins as a drink for the same forgiveness of all of our sins.

And He will make us lie down. One day we will all lie down in our graves, but that is not what He is talking about. One day, we will all lie down in comfort and blessedness because of what Jesus Christ has done for us. We will all be at ease because that great foe, the roaring lion, satan is defeated and He will be able to plague us no more. He will make us lie down and He will care for all of our needs... this is what our Shepherd will do, what He has promised to do.

When one looks at the Christian church one can see that God has upheld His promise. He has called all of His children from all the peoples of the world. He has called His faithful from all the continents, all the countries, all the tribes... God has called those who hear His voice and He still calls out to this day. And God has blessed us with

the opportunity to take this message to these same people.

Through pastors, through missionaries, through you and me, God has given us all the opportunity to share His great and glorious message and He has allowed us to partake in His great plan.

Going back to Peter, we can see that when Peter was 'reinstated' as an apostle Jesus asked him if he loved his sheep... and then told Peter to go and feed his sheep. Just like Peter, Jesus would like each and every one of us to feed the sheep that He has won.

Whether they are our friends, our families, or even people we do not know Christ would have us feed His sheep with His word and with His promises.

Thanks be to God that He has chosen us to feed His sheep with His word. Thanks be to

God that He has called His sheep and that
His sheep hear His voice. And thanks be to
God that the Lord is our Shepherd.

Thanks be to God. Amen.