

Sermon: 4th Sunday of Easter – The Sunday of the Good Shepherd

Text: John 10:22-30 (vv.27-28)

Theme: We belong to Jesus; therefore...

Goal: To comfort people by the assurance that the Good Shepherd cares for His sheep.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: Jesus had two groups of people among His listeners:

Those who believed in Him and those who didn't believe in Him.

Answering a question set by the unbelievers, Jesus highlighted the big privilege the believers have: To be His sheep, to belong to Him, and what it means in their – in our – personal lives.

Jesus calls His believers as “My sheep”. Revelation 5:9 says about Jesus: “With Your blood You have purchased men to God from every tribe and language and people and nation.” Jesus paid a high price to buy us for God: He gave His own life on the cross! – Talking to the Elders of Ephesus the Apostle Paul warned them: “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). The sheep didn't belong to the Elders or to the Pastors so they did not have the authority to do with them what they wanted; the sheep belong to Jesus! – Revelation 7:4 says that we were sealed in our foreheads. We are God's property! This is a privilege and a guarantee which we enjoy as believers and as sheep of Jesus' flock!

Jesus then describes what the behaviour of the believers is like and how His sheep behave, so that anyone can recognize them; and comforts His sheep with many promises of assurance of the Good

Shepherd. Jesus alternates “They” and “I” in several statements, talking about our reaction as believers and about His promises to us.

I – We belong to Jesus; therefore: We listen to His voice.

The first statement is: “My sheep listen to my voice.” Jesus had already said this at the beginning of this chapter, when He introduced Himself as the Good Shepherd: “The sheep listen to my voice” (John 20:3). Listen to Jesus’ voice is part of the Third Commandment, as Luther explains: *We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.* People recognize that we are Jesus’ sheep when we come to the Services and live a godly life according to His will (1st Petition of the Lord’s Prayer).

II - We belong to Jesus; therefore: He knows us by name

The second statement is: “I know them.” Jesus had said about the Good Shepherd some days before: “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— just as the Father knows me and I know the Father ...I call my own sheep by name...” (John 20:14,15,3). I love the text of Isaiah 43:1: “The Lord who created you says, ‘Do not be afraid – I will save you. I have called you by name – you are mine!’” And also the text of Isaiah 49:15, 16: “I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands”. - This happened at our Baptism, when our name was registered in the Book of Life by God Himself. The many names written in the Bible show that God works with individuals and knows each of us by name!

III – We belong to Jesus; therefore: We follow Him

“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me” is the next statement of Jesus. To follow Jesus means to obey Him, to be His disciple, to be always close to Him and to the other sheep.

Sheep don't walk alone. They are stupid, they wander astray if they abandon the flock, and become easy prey to predators. Following the Good Shepherd is the only way to reach the goal of our lives: the eternal life with God! We don't know the way leading to eternal life by ourselves, but we are confident that Jesus leads us even "through the valley of the shadow of death" and that "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever", as we confess in Psalm 23:2, 4, 6.

IV – We belong to Jesus; therefore: He gives us eternal life

All of these blessings are only possible because of Jesus' promise: "I give them eternal life." Eternal life is not something in the future, but we have it from the very instant we believe in Jesus. It's a gift of God, which begins here and continuous in heaven. Our eternal life was created by Jesus' death and confirmed by His resurrection. "I am the way and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6) says Jesus. (I became very impressed that this text was read by the Prime Minister at the Funeral Service of Margaret Thatcher on last Wednesday; and it was even highlighted by the Bishop of London in his preaching.)

V – We belong to Jesus; therefore: We shall never perish.

Whoever does not have the life Jesus gives us will perish, here and eternally. But the promise of Jesus to His sheep is "They shall never perish". These words echo John 3:16 and following: "The Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

VI – We belong to Jesus; therefore: We are sheltered

The sixth statement of Jesus in this text says: “No one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.” -

How can we understand then that so many Christians fall by the roadside? St. Peter warns us: “Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith” (1 Peter 5:8, 9). God wants to hold us firm in His hands. But unfortunately we have the option to decide to jump out of His gracious hands, or to stretch our hands out to the devil. God is faithful and His promises are true, they are not lies. We are in His hands by His grace. Let us run always to the centre of His hand, and not stand on the border, looking to the temptations Satan is offering us. If we, as Jesus’ sheep, listen to His voice and follow Him by faith, no one can snatch us out of His hand!

Conclusion: Believe or not believe, - that is the question (Can I say this?) If you don’t believe in Jesus and don’t follow Him, you remain in doubts and you are wandering in darkness. If you believe in Jesus and follow Him faithfully, you are secure in His hands and in His flock. There are only two groups of people; we can even say: There are only two religions or two big churches: The believers and the non-believers.

We are gathered in God’s house as sheep of His flock. All His promises in this Gospel of the Good Shepherd and in the entire Bible are for us. Believe it and be blessed. Amen.