

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Pentecost 8B (Proper 11B)
July 18, 2021
Mark 6:30-44

The Shepherd Who Feeds in Green Pastures

When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things. (Mark 6:34 ESV)

In the Name of Jesus, the Good Shepherd and only Savior of the world.

Have you ever been so busy that you didn't have time to eat? Jesus and His disciples did. There was always more to do, more people to serve, more sheep to care for. And the Good Shepherd shows that He cares for His disciples and His sheep.

Now, you've heard it before, and you probably know it much better than I do, that sheep need shepherds to care for them, to feed them, to lead them to green pastures and beside still waters. Sheep need shepherds to guard and protect them from predators and danger, and to seek them when they're lost. Sheep need shepherds to bind up their wounds when they are attacked and injured.

But when shepherds are unfaithful, they do great harm to the sheep and put them at great risk of destruction. Thus, those given the responsibility to shepherd God's flock of Israel had been unfaithful and had brought down God's judgment upon themselves as we heard in today's Old Testament reading, "I will attend to you for your evil deeds, declares the LORD." (Jer. 23:2). The kings, priests, and false prophets had led the people of God astray. They had turned them away from the one true God to worship false gods and had put their trust in princes rather than in God Himself. Indeed, the shepherds had scattered the sheep and driven them away from their true Shepherd.

And yet, God never did abandon His flock. He had promised, "I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing." (Jer. 23:3-4). Yes, God Himself was going to take a hand-on approach to care for His flock.

So He sent His only-begotten Son to be that Shepherd. In today's Gospel, He starts with His disciples. They had returned from their preaching and teaching tour, and were so surrounded by people they didn't even have time to eat. So Jesus was going to lead them away for a time of rest and rejuvenation. They got into a boat and set out for a desolate place where they could spend some alone-time with Jesus.

But, alas, the people knew them and saw them get into a boat. So they ran on ahead and arrived before Jesus did. And when Jesus sees the people who had come out to this desolate place, He “had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.” And so they were. They were spiritually lost and didn't have anyone to lead them to green pastures and beside still waters, or refresh their souls. Their leaders had led them astray. They were wandering around aimlessly. They had no one to protect them from false teachers or to provide true spiritual food for them. And now, Jesus, God-with-us in the flesh, had come to His people. He was the Great Shepherd of His sheep.

But Jesus' compassion was no mere feeling of sympathy. Rather it is a very active thing. Jesus' guts churned within Him to the point that He did something. And what these people needed most was spiritual food. So Jesus fed them. He taught them many things. What were those things? We're not told here. But we can be sure that His words were balm for wounded consciences and ravaged souls. He filled them with the very Bread of Life as He revealed His great love for them.

And when the disciples wanted to send the people away to get food, Jesus tells *them* to give them something to eat. As shepherds-in-training, these disciples often tried to send people away from Jesus. But Jesus was all about teaching them another way. When He asks what they had, they reply, “Five [loaves], and two fish.” They would learn that in Jesus' hands, that would be enough – and more than enough.

Jesus directed the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. How like the Good Shepherd that He is. “And taking the five loaves and the two fish he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all. And they all ate and were satisfied.” Jesus had fed their souls and now He fed their bodies too. They were all satisfied.

Beloved, we too are like sheep. We who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ (Eph. 2:13). He is our Good Shepherd. He brought us into His flock, as our parents, our first earthly shepherds, brought us to the font where our sins were washed away and we were made lambs in God's flock. And having Christ as our Shepherd, He nourishes us, refreshes our souls, with His Word and sacraments as He forgives our sins. As we come to this place for rest, having followed Jesus from all the towns, we hear His Word read and proclaimed by His under-shepherd. We eat and drink His very Body and Blood which was given and shed for us on the cross. When He gave up His life for us, He showed the depth of His compassion. He knew that we could never save ourselves, even if we wanted to. So, He took upon Himself the sins of the whole world, including all of yours, and suffered the punishment we all deserve. He gave Himself as the sacrificial Lamb of God to shed His holy blood and die on the altar of the cross. What love! What compassion!

And He continues to call men to be His under-shepherds, to distribute His gifts, to tend His sheep. No, He doesn't call them directly as He did the Apostles. Rather, He calls them through His Church. Having been trained in His Word, they are sent out to serve the people of God with

that Word and to deliver it, both Law and Gospel, to His people. He sends them out to warn His people of various dangers and to guard them from false and pernicious doctrine. He sends them to shepherd His flock in His stead and at His command, and feed them with the Bread of Life Himself.

So, after a hard week of living out in the world, under constant attack by the devil, the world, and even our own sinful flesh, we come to our Savior for rest. After all, didn't He tell us, "Come unto me all you that are heavy laden, and I will give you rest?" And isn't that what we're doing here? Aren't we resting from the cares and concerns of the world? Don't we need forgiveness for our many sins, especially those times we wandered off and did as we pleased? Of course, we do! And He provides us the very rest we need as He restores our souls with His gracious Word of forgiveness and peace with God.

But we don't get to stay here and rest forever. In fact, the time of rest may seem too short. Yet, we have to go back to work. The purpose of rest is to refresh and rejuvenate us so we can go back out to live in the world. The rest Christ gives is to enable us to serve others as we are able. He serves us with the Gospel of forgiveness so we can go from here recharged to show compassion toward others. We are assured of His presence because He has said He will never leave us nor forsake us. So when we face the world, when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we won't be afraid. And when our days on earth have come to an end, we are assured that He will lead us to everlasting rest where we will live in the house of the LORD forever.

God grant us faithful under-shepherds to lead us in the way of truth, to lead us to the green pastures and still waters of the forgiveness of sins, to guard and protect us from danger and the attacks of our enemies, to bind up our wounds, and to lead us to rest in Christ now and forever. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener