

# KING OF KINGS LUTHERAN CHURCH



## John 10:11-18

*Set Free by Our Shepherd*

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Here's my latest, self-induced, but minor, problem. The security guard at my bank is a very nice guy. Not only has the bank not been robbed (to the best of my knowledge) but he stands outside and warmly greets the customers as they come in. He holds the door for most as they enter and as they exit. But he thinks my name is Steve. I don't know why. I suspect there is some other tall, good-looking guy who banks there. But the problem is of my own making. The first time he called me Steve, I was walking in a group and people and, naturally, I assumed he wasn't talking to me. The next time he said it, I was walking out of the bank with my back to him when I heard, "Have a nice day, Steve." I thought that he couldn't be talking to me, but I realized the coincidence of hearing the name "Steve" for a second time. The next time I went to the bank, he was looking right at me and said, "Hi, Steve." I panicked, because he is so nice to everyone and didn't want to embarrass him. I said, "Good morning," thereby acknowledging that my name was Steve. Internally, I was immediately yelling at myself. Why would I not tell him that my name is not Steve?! The opportunity to do the right thing was there, but I was afraid to say anything. Of course, now I'm terrified of walking into the bank at the same time as the real Steve and being exposed as a fraud.

On Good Shepherd Sunday, the vivid image is that we are sheep. Sheep are notorious among shepherds for making poor choices. They do this, not because they are stupid, as some suppose, but because they are easily frightened and then panic.

My recent, poor choice is an embarrassing example of what we all do, often in far more serious ways. We make bad choices that have a negative impact on our lives. You know you should speak in a more kind respectful way to your parents; but in the moment of choice you let selfishness get the best of you. You know you

should be more considerate to your wife or husband and make an effort to more willingly serve; but in that moment of choice you think of yourself first. You know you should go to Bible Class or read your Bible at home more frequently, but in that moment of choice you panic and do what your habits lead you to do.

The on-going struggle for the Christian is that we really are spiritual sheep. When attacked by Satan, his temptations quickly lead us down the wrong path. Like sheep, we cannot find our own solutions to these problems. We need help finding the right food so that we are spiritually strong enough to resist temptation.

**"I am the Good Shepherd,"** says Jesus. **"I know my sheep and my sheep know me."** Jesus identifies himself as the one who will care for us. He will provide for our needs. The greatest care that he provides is that **"The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."** Rather than let sin and death devour us, Jesus stood in the way of sin and death and was devoured by them. On the cross, he would take the curse of our sins. By his resurrection he sets us free from the consequences of a life-time of foolish choices.

The imagery of Good Shepherd Sunday is very clear. When danger threatened his sheep, our Shepherd didn't panic and run in order to save himself, he gave up his life to save us. For us to live with spiritual strength to make the right choices in those moments when we have often failed, we need Jesus. We need to recognize that we belong his flock.

During the season of Easter, Romans 6 reminds us that baptism connects us to Jesus' resurrection. There we read, **"We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life"** (v. 4). In the water of Baptism, you were connected to Jesus' death and resurrection. That connection

means that you are free from sin. You are free from the horrible guilt of sin and a looming future in hell. All your punishment is removed.

You are also free from sin's power to lead you to make bad choices. You belong to the flock of the Good Shepherd.

When we realize who we are because of Jesus Christ, we are able to take action in our own lives that reflects who we are because of Jesus. As a baptized child of God who belongs to the glorious flock of the Good Shepherd:

- ◆ We can keep love and trust others. In our keeping of the 8th Commandment, ***"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor,"*** we can remember the encouragement Luther included: *"Take his words and actions in the kindest possible way"* (Small Catechism). As God's people, we can show the love and kindness of Christ to others.
- ◆ Our Good Shepherd makes us into sheep who can forgive as we have been forgiven. We say it in the Lord's Prayer. In Christ, we can live it in our homes and relationships with others. Forgiveness can change our relationships and our lives.
- ◆ We can be kind to people, even when they don't deserve it. Whether it be on the playground or hallways of school, or at the office, or a total stranger in the store, or a rude family member who took the last cookie, as baptized children of God we can show love in those moments that might seem like we should get angry.
- ◆ Our Good Shepherd opens our eyes to the fact that he has **"other sheep"** and makes us

eager to **"bring them also."** It starts with recognizing that those who don't know Christ are lost in the darkness of sin and death. Christ loves those sheep and wants them to believe in him. Love them like Jesus does and speak to those who don't know Jesus. Invite them to church. Tell them about the Good Shepherd who gave his life so that his sheep could live forever.

- ◆ We can live godly lives even when we face hardship and suffering. Our troubles don't change our relationship with our Savior. In fact, at times they improve our relationship with our Savior by reminding us of our need for his love.

Those choices we make out of fear or habit are not the only option. The Good Shepherd laid down his life to free us from those sins. This forgiveness and freedom is what we really need for living in this world of sin and in our own bodies that have a sinful nature. Life improves when we turn from our selfish ways and, in repentance, live as baptized children of God.

Live in the confidence that Jesus' resurrection crushed death's power over you. Live in the joy of knowing that you are alive in Christ and can overcome the power of sin to lead you into godless living. Live in the peace of Jesus' forgiveness so that Satan's accusations are silenced by the Savior's forgiveness.

Look at the worldly and spiritual care you have received from your Savior and let his love for you guide you as you make choices that reflect who you really are. Amen.

Easter 4  
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