

St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church
Sermon by
Pastor A. E. Schultz
5th Sunday aft Pentecost C.
June 23, 2013
Zechariah 13:7-10



The Shepherd Struck, the Sheep Scattered

⁷“Awake, sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is close to me!” declares the LORD Almighty. “Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered, and I will turn my hand against the little ones. ⁸In the whole land,” declares the LORD, “two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it. ⁹This third I will put into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, ‘They are my people,’ and they will say, ‘The LORD is our God.’”

Dear children of our Heavenly Father – precious in His sight for Jesus’ sake:

If you go to Mt. Rushmore – they have one of those souvenir shops where you can buy T-shirts, refrigerator magnets and travel coffee mugs. In the very middle of the store sits a very small grandpa nicknamed “Nick” – Don call me “Nick” Clifford. Mr. Clifford actually sat on one of those little wooden seats – fastened to ropes – and thrown over the side of the mountain – to chisel out Washington and Jefferson and Roosevelt and Lincoln! Nick wrote a little paperback book – the most frequently asked questions about Mt. Rushmore. The most frequently asked question, “Was it hard?” Nick signed our copy of his little paperback book and I watched his hands. They are small – but they did not tremble. His joints of his fingers were swollen from arthritis as he very neatly wrote our name and his name and the date inside our copy of his book. When you shake his hand – his handshake is firm and strong. I have said before – one of the simplest blessings of pastor stuff is shaking lots and lots of hands. The ultimate hands will be Jesus’ nail marked hands – which will take hold of us – when we come home to Heaven. We are in God’s House again today because of Jesus’ nail marked hands – the hands of the risen Christ.

Today – in light of Hebrew poetry inspired by the Holy Spirit – through the pen of the prophet Zechariah we will be reminded:

Jesus Is My Good Shepherd

2. The gift of God is eternal life

The part of God's Word we are concentrating on is from the scroll of the prophet Zechariah. It is again important to appreciate the context. Think back to God's people from the Kingdom of Judah – carried off into captivity for 70 years in far off Babylon – painful discipline because the LORD – the Great I AM – loved them so much. One night – according to God's flawless long-range planning – when wicked and arrogant King Belshazzar was celebrating with a drunken feast – using the very golden cups from the Temple in his drunkenness when he literally – literally saw the writing on the wall. **"Mene, Mene, tekem, parsin..."** The LORD had weighed Belshazzar and measured him and found him lacking. The LORD used Cyrus – King of the Medes and Persians to bring Belshazzar's rule to a sudden and complete end! Ezra 1:1 says, **"In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation through his realm and to put it in writing."** It was time for God's people to go home – back to Israel – back to the place where the little Christ child would be born to rescue us from all our sins! The people walked back to Jerusalem – to rebuild their lives, their nation. And most important of all – to rebuild the Temple – where they came near to the LORD with sin offerings and guilt offerings, with fellowship offerings – with thank-offerings out of gratitude for the promise that the ultimate Lamb of God would be sacrificed one time – to wash away the sins of the world. The work began well enough – but before long something went horribly wrong. Most likely something went horribly wrong in the hearts and minds of the people. That's what the LORD cares about – the hearts and minds – the faith and the attitude of His people. God's Word says, **"But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy. No one could distinguish the sound of the shouts of joy from the sound of weeping, because the people made so much noise."** Ezra 3:12,13 Pastor Hartzel quotes, *"This weeping can hardly be explained merely from the recollection of the trials and sufferings of the last 50 years, which came involuntarily in their mind at that*

moment of solemn rejoicing, but was no doubt occasioned chiefly by the sight of the miserable circumstances under which the congregation took this work in hand."

Zechariah talks about the end times – our times. He talks about how the nations will gather together to fight against Jerusalem and Judah – against those who believe the Gospel promises of God – that’s us! The struggle will be fierce – but let us not be discouraged! The LORD himself will come to purge the land of our oppressors and their false gods – small “g” gods. I read the other day – a chapter in a book by a very popular atheist. As Paul Harvey used to say, “I’m sure he would want me to mention his name.” In his book he lumps all religions together – Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, Taoism, Mormonism and more. Then he talks about the painful aspects of humble day to day life. If there is a God who is love – good through and through – with power to create the universe – able to heal the blind and cure the leper and raise the dead – then why is there blindness, cancer, heart attacks, strokes and death? If God is love – how could he ever create a place like hell? Why does he create people so fatally flawed in every respect? Why? He shakes his bony little fist at heaven and demands answers from the Almighty if there is one! There are people like the atheists with their doctorates that blaspheme the LORD. They are to be pitied – not hated – as their souls remain in the deadly clutches of the devil and unbelief! The day will come when the words of Scripture, **“Be still and know that I am God...”** – will put an end to their angry taunts and mindless complaints. The LORD through Zechariah – has promised as much.

Over 350 years before the fact – the prophet Zechariah writes down what will happen in the Garden of Gethsemane. **7 “Awake, sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is close to me!” declares the LORD Almighty. “Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered, and I will turn my hand against the little ones. “** The shepherd **is the Good Shepherd – the one close to Father His Heavenly!** How close is Jesus to His Heavenly Father? **Jesus said, “I and my Father are One!”** You cannot get any closer than that. It is a mystery beyond figuring out – how God the Father and Jesus His Son and the Holy Spirit are three persons and yet one God – indivisible! You cannot fit a miracle like that into our sin spoiled minds. **“Awake, sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is close to me!...Strike the shepherd...”** Again this sounds familiar. It’s just like Isaiah chapter 53. **4 Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering,**

yet we considered him punished by God, **stricken** by him, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. ⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. ⁷ He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

“Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered, and I will turn my hand against the little ones... This is a hard – a difficult saying – I will turn my hand against the little ones. What does that mean? In one of the Pastor books that’s supposed to help explain these things it says, *“Jesus’ followers, who are left despondent and helpless after the Shepherd is struck down. The Lord promises, “I will turn my hand against the little ones,” that is, he will make them the object of his attention. While the Hebrew phrase may express the use of one’s hand upon another for judgment, it may also express the use of one’s hand upon another for salvation.”* (Sermon Studies On Christian Worship Texts) It would be easiest – just to skip over this part – but that’s not right – is it? **Hand against the little ones...** Does Jesus love the little ones – his sheep – little ones in respect to size and age – or little ones in respect to faith – new and perhaps gentle and breakable? Perhaps. Did your earthly father ever turn his hand against you when you were little? I was spanked often as a little child – in discipline – because my earthly Father loved me. Does your Heavenly Father discipline little ones because he loves them? Yes, he does. I think that might be a good way to understand this. Little ones loved by their Heavenly Father will be disciplined by Him. Little children do not get to be terrible because they are two years old. When we love our children we will discipline them – to train and instruct them in the wisdom and discipline of our LORD!

⁸ **“In the whole land,” declares the LORD, “two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it. ⁹ This third I will put into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold.”** It would be nice – **Jesus died for all that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.** It would be wonderful if everyone who was brought to baptism as an infant – would learn and study God’s Word in their home and in Sunday School and the Day School and then in Confirmation Class. Wonderful if

they were at public worship again and again – at Lord’s Supper – what – some twice a month plus Maundy Thursday and Good Friday – and New Year’s Eve and New Year’s Day and more Sundays – when they visited Church with family out of town on the 1st and 3rd and 4th when there are 5 Sundays in a month – a person could go to Lord’s Supper – easily some 30+ times a year. We could read our Bibles cover to cover year after year. There are people at Heritage Homes who have read their Bible cover to cover 3 times and more! We could do like Martin Luther recommended – and memorize Paul’s letter to the Romans – and that would be wonderful, too. The fact of the matter is – each year – a painful number of young people confirmed when they were 14 – by the time they are 21 – don’t go to Church anywhere! Zechariah talks about 2/3 will be struck down and perishing. The 1/3 that remains – going through the fire – to be refined – to burn away the painful and hurtful impurities! Jesus talked about spiritual danger in his sermon on the grassy hillside. **“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction (*eternal destruction*), and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”** Matthew 7:13,14

They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, ‘They are my people,’ and they will say, ‘The LORD is our God.’” Today we are reminded we are saved by grace through faith in the Good Shepherd – struck down by our Heavenly Father – to wash away all our sins! We have by the grace of God – the opportunity to put this Gospel of forgiveness for the sake of the Risen Christ – into concrete practice. There was a man standing at the drive up window of a fast food window – not a little upset. The person in the next car – videotaped the customer – violently upset because they put cheese on his hamburger – when he didn’t want cheese – didn’t order cheese. Why were the workers at this fast food restaurant so completely incompetent – every time he came there?! It would be funny – if it wasn’t so pathetic! I’m not saying it’s easy not to be frustrated when you get bad service. But if we are going to live like adopted children of the Prince of Peace – we need to pray all the time that Jesus would make us patient. And when we have a job – whatever that job might be – like making hamburgers – we need to pay attention – did they order cheese or not? If we are making filet-o-fish sandwiches – we need to line up – the bottom bun – the cheese, the fish, the tartar sauce – and the top bun – so

that they all fit together. Not the bun here – the cheese over here – and the fish somewhere else. We can do whatever we do – to the glory of the One who died and rose again to forgive us. We can do our job exceedingly well – even if no one will ever take note or appreciate it – because what we do – we are doing for Jesus. Only Jesus can bless us – to make us patient customers and faithful skillful workers giving glory to Him!

They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The LORD is our God.'" A girl named Paula was just 15 years old down in Indiana when she and 3 of her friends murdered a little grandma – a Bible School teacher named Ruth. Paula was the actual killer using a knife – it was a murder of unspeakable violence. Paula's picture after her arrest – she has her hair brushed and greased to make horns over her head. She has a look of "attitude" on her face like, "What *chew* looking at?!" Paula has been in trouble some 23 times – while in prison. Now she has taken classes in prison and earned a bachelor's degree. She says she has turned her life around. Now she is going from death row to being released. What do you think about that? From an unspeakable murder at age 15 to being set free? Is that right? Is that justice for her victim? I don't pretend to know the answer to that. But this I do know – Jesus died on the cross for Paula and for sinners like you and like me. Jesus the Good Shepherd died on the cross – so that when we die we will be safe by Jesus forever in Heaven. The wages our sins deserve are nothing less than death. The gift of God is eternal life – by grace through faith! We are saved by grace – grace free and boundless. And because of Jesus' mercy we are completely forgiven. Amen!

To God alone all glory!

~~Rev. Anthony A. Schultz~~