

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church -- Watertown, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Christ the King Sunday -- November 17th and 20th, 2011

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 23-24

¹¹“For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. ¹²As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. ¹³I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. ¹⁴I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. ¹⁶I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.

²³I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. ²⁴I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken.

Dear sheep of the Good Shepherd. Amen

Has it ever happened to you? A person older than you, maybe a grandma or grandpa, steps up and says, “I’m so glad I’m not your age. You are going to live through things we never dreamed would happen.” When I first graduated from the seminary and attended pastors’ conferences, some of the older pastors would say, “I’m glad I’m not you. I can’t imagine the kinds of things you’ll be facing in twenty, thirty or forty years from now.” As the years go by it becomes easier to understand what those older guys were talking about. I’m saying that I believe those people were right. We live in a mad, crazy world. The longer we live, the more of life we experience, the more we scratch our heads and wonder what has become of this planet.

But then, God never lead us to expect that life would be otherwise in this sin-cursed world, did he? In fact, if you look closely in your Bible you will read in the book of Job, **“Man is born unto trouble as surely as sparks fly upward.” (Job 5:7)** Think of that the next time you are sitting around a campfire watching the sparks fly up into the air. Or remember Jesus’ words. When he walked in our world he said, **“In this world you will have trouble.” (John 16:33)** And Paul said it too, **“We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.” (Acts 14:22)** Over and over God’s word makes it clear that as long as we are on this side of heaven life is going to be filled with sin and the bitter consequences of sin.

The inspired author of the words before us today undoubtedly drew the very same conclusion. Ezekiel lived 2500 years ago. It was a mad, crazy world back then too. He served Jewish people who had been ripped from their homeland and resettled in a foreign and Godless country. What would happen to those Jewish exiles? How would they survive those mad days? By inspiration God gave Pastor Ezekiel an answer to those questions; an answer that still stands today. Ezekiel told his contemporaries that a shepherd king named David would serve in their midst and tend to all their needs. If you know your Old Testament history, you know that in Ezekiel’s day the Old Testament King David had been dead for 400 years. But he wasn’t the king to whom Ezekiel was referring; he was referring to a descendent of David, the one who we know as the Good Shepherd. He was referring to Jesus who is also called the Son of David. God’s message to Ezekiel and his contemporaries, God’s message to us is that in a world that seems to have gone mad, we have a Shepherd King named Jesus. Knowing that Shepherd King and the way he rules enables us to say,

Sermon Theme: The Lord Is My Shepherd

1. He guides and guards his sheep
2. He leads and feeds his sheep
3. His sheep can rest in peace

1. He guides and guards his sheep

Listen to the way our Shepherd King describes his activity. **“I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness.”** Do you notice that King Jesus doesn't do his shepherding seated at a throne in heaven watching over his flocks through remote camera surveillance? He's right there among his sheep because there is nothing more important to him than their safety.

Let's translate that truth into our lives. Does Jesus know the circumstances we're living in right now? Does he know how unstable our economy is and how uncertain our future seems? You bet he does! Does Jesus know the things that distress us in day-to-day life? Yes! Does he know when you're in danger? Yes! Does he know when you're in trouble? Yes! Does he see the devil crouching, ready to pounce all over you, ready to maul you with your own guilt, ready to rip you apart with accusations that sound very accurate and feel very condemning? Yes! Does he see things that even you and I don't see, the subtle temptations, the ways that money and success threaten our souls, how we're tempted to gauge God's goodness by how we feel our lives are going? Yes! Does he see how we're tempted to think that what makes us a Christian is our life instead of Jesus' death? Yes! He sees everything that threatens or assaults us in body or soul. That's why he would never blow us off or let us fend for ourselves. He lives to watch over us!

2. He leads and feeds his sheep

Don't you wonder, with a Shepherd King like this why do we stray? Why would we stray? But we do, don't we? Think about the many ways we've strayed in life. Someone hurts us in life and we say, "I don't want to be nice to that person and I'm not going to be." That sin separates us from the Shepherd, it takes us far away from him. Money gets tight and we start to literally panic forgetting that trusting money for our security drives us away from God. Jesus said it, "You can't serve God and money." Just ask Judas. Sometimes we can wander away from him to the point where we do days or weeks without standing before him on our own and confessing our sins. Sometimes it is just the opposite. Sometimes we fall into a sin that is so memorable that it virtually breaks our legs beneath us: the words we spoke, the promise we broke, the thing that did that makes us hang our head in shame so that when Jesus calls us to his side, we think, "No! I can't. I can't face him." It is a frightful thing to realize how often and how far we have wandered. It is a frightful thing to think of standing as a criminal in the court of Christ the King and hearing the damning words, "Guilty as charged!"

That's why it is so comforting to be reminded of how the Shepherd King not only watches over his sheep, he sees to it that they get the food that they need. Listen again to the king's words through Ezekiel, **“I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture.”** There is a place where the Shepherd who is the King of Love loves to take the sheep and the sheep love to go there. It's a place where the grass is thick and green, the water cool and clear, and the Shepherd's voice as calming and comforting as anything could ever be. It's a place called John 3:16, **“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.”** It's a place called Romans 5:8, **“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While**

we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” It’s a place called 2 Corinthians 5:21, **“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”** It’s a place called Ephesians 1:7, **“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.”** It’s a place called 1 John 1:7, **“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”** It’s a place like this baptismal font where our Shepherd King says, **“As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”** It’s a place like this communion altar where our Shepherd King says, **“Here, this is my body, this is my blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins.”**

Jesus leads us to places in his Word where we have to say, “I have strayed. I deserve banishment. I am broken and crushed. I can’t save myself,” only so that we can appreciate it when he says, **“I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak.”** Think of how much he loves us! Jesus the Shepherd King never strayed, but it was God’s will to crush him in our place. Jesus loved God with all of his heart, but it was God’s will to banish him and abandon him to hell. He did it so that all of our grudge bearing, the idolatry, the pride, the unspeakable shame, the accumulated guilt of an entire life, could be nailed to the cross with Jesus and done away with by his blood. The King of Love is your Shepherd. He lives to restore you, to feed you with forgiveness, to have you trust more than you trust anything else, that the God who cleansed you loves you.

3. His sheep can rest in peace

Assured of that blessed truth let’s go back to the picture we started with this morning. No matter how wicked or how mean this world becomes, no matter how distressed or distraught the present circumstances might lead you to be, remember that the one in control is our Shepherd King of Love who enabled David to say, **“I shall not want.”** To illustrate the comfort of that reality I’d like to think about the monarchy in England. This past summer Prince William got married to Kate Middleton and the amount of people, pomp and festivity that went into this marriage of the possible future king of England. People stopped what they were doing and it was all for Prince Charles’s son getting married. If there is this much praise and festivity for the Queen’s grandson, you can only imagine what is done for the king or queen themselves.

But as much as the people of England adore and glorify their queen or king, they are just human beings who someday soon will leave this world. While they undoubtedly care for their people, they are virtually detached from their lives and powerless to change the circumstances of their lives. And think about how unapproachable a queen or king is when they have dozens of armed soldiers surrounding him wherever they go.

Now by comparison, think of our Shepherd King. Think of how approachable he is. “Come to me!” he says and you can reach him anytime day and night. Remember how much he loves you! He laid down his life for you to pay for your sins and secure your eternal destiny. Think of how attached he is to you! “I am with you always!” he says. Think of how inseparable his love is from you. Paul says nothing can separate us from God’s love in Christ. Think of how powerful he is, “He is able to do immeasurably more than any of us can ask or imagine.” There is no problem so big, no trouble so terrible that he cannot use his power to turn it for our good.

With a Shepherd King like that we can look at this mad world we live in and still be at peace. We can say with David, **“The Lord’s my shepherd; I shall not be in want.”** Amen