

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church -- Watertown, WI  
Pastor Mark Gartner  
Sermon for Christ the King Sunday -- November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2014

**Ezekiel 34:11-16, 23-24 (NIV – 1984)**

<sup>11</sup>“For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. <sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>I 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. <sup>14</sup>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 on the mountains of Israel. <sup>15</sup>I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. <sup>16</sup>I 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.

<sup>23</sup>I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. <sup>24</sup>I 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

Ever wonder what a pack of wolves are thinking as they surround a flock of sheep. If you could read their minds, I wonder what you would see. They're probably thinking: "Look at all those dumb sheep all huddled together. No excitement in their lives. All they do is eat grass all day and follow a shepherd around. No freedom in their lives."

The Bible often pictures believers in Jesus as sheep or lambs. Jesus once said to his believers: **"I'm sending you out like sheep among wolves."** What the unbeliever thinks about you and me is probably very similar to what a pack of wolves think about sheep: "Look at all those dumb Christians. They waste their Sunday mornings at church. All they do is read the Bible. They feel guilty when they sin. They're so narrow-minded. They think there's only one way to heaven. They have no mind of their own, no fun, and no excitement."

Of course, the life of a wolf is actually much worse than that of a sheep. Although the wolf is a beautiful animal, sleek and powerful, he's also a loner. He travels in packs only to find food. We describe a person as being a "lone wolf." It's really hard to see a wolf at the zoo, because he's always hiding. Or if you do see one, he's pacing nervously back and forth, never really settled or satisfied. He never seems content.

Unbelievers are like wolves. They're never really settled or satisfied in life, always on the move trying to find the next thing that will bring happiness. For all his outward happiness, deep down the unbeliever is scared. He's afraid of death, not really sure what's going to happen to him when he dies. He's nervous, because without any proof he has to convince himself that there is no life after death. No matter how much he has, he's always searching but never really finding. What a blessing it is to know . . .

**Sermon Theme: We Are Jesus' Sheep!**

- 1. Jesus leads us**
- 2. Jesus feeds us**
- 3. Jesus give us peace**

Believers are content, because they know how they became sheep. We got to be sheep of our Savior because God brought us to faith in our Good Shepherd. Sheep don't choose their shepherd. The shepherd chooses the sheep. Listen to what Ezekiel says: **"For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. {12} 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.** The emphasis is on the word *myself*. All by himself God made us believers. God is the one who chose us to believe and chose us to follow the Good Shepherd. A cake rises all by itself in the oven, but the cake wouldn't do anything at all, if the cook didn't put it in the oven. We are believers, but God all by himself made us believers. That can make us very content and quiet inside.

There are many today, even some who call themselves disciples of Jesus, who have forgotten this important truth. The believer did not choose Jesus. Jesus chose the believer. This order is perverted and twisted when people believe and say that they decided to accept Jesus, or they found Christ, or they decided to follow Christ. The Bible says: **"No man can say Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit,"** the Bible says. Our faith in Jesus is pure gift from God. **"It is by grace you have been saved through faith, it is the gift of God, so that no one can boast."** Even our good works are God's work in us. **"We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."** What love for Jesus there will be in the heart of the person who really believes that! If we speak, we'll boast about what great things God has done for us. But of our own selves we'll be silent. We'll be dumb sheep.

Although the sheep of Jesus are silent about their own works, that doesn't mean they're not busy. Jesus' sheep are occupied with the main thing a sheep does - eating. No matter where his sheep are in this wide world, the Good Shepherd gathers them and feeds them. **"I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. {14} 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 on the mountains of Israel."** In the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm it says that the Good Shepherd **"makes us lie down in green pastures and leads us beside quiet waters."** In the New Testament Jesus said: **"I am the Good Shepherd,"** and then he spoke of leading his sheep in and out of the fold to pasture.

One thing is sure. Sheep do a lot of eating. No real sheep would pass up the opportunity. No real sheep would consider it a duty to eat. He looks forward to it. He gets eagerly at it. For Jesus' sheep, eating is receiving God's Word. Jesus himself said: **"If a man loves me, he will love my words...My sheep listen to my voice."** Sadly, there are many other voices out there, too. Sometimes the other voices drown out the voice of the Good Shepherd. We have more talk shows, more information, more communication than any other people in history. There probably isn't a number high enough for all the words that are spoken in this world in one day. But has all the talking made us happier people? If anything, it's made us sadder. May we always listen to the voice of our Lord and Savior.

A well-fed sheep is a content sheep. To be content means that we would rather listen than talk. None of our talk strengthens our faith. Not even the talking we do with God can make us stronger in faith. It's not what the sheep gives the Shepherd that makes them healthy. It's what the Shepherd gives the sheep. May we all learn to be content sheep - content enough to come to worship every Sunday, content enough to come to a weekly Bible class, content to send our children to Sunday School and Catechism class regularly, content to have a devotion with our family, content enough to read our Bible for ourselves each day. The world claims to be smart and free and happy. But like the wolf in his cage, they have no peace. The world laughs at the sheep of the Good Shepherd and considers them dumb. But Jesus' sheep are truly free and happy and at peace. We quietly listen as the Good Shepherd feeds us with his Word.

There's one more thing that makes the sheep of Jesus content. In real life, of course, sheep are eventually slaughtered for the profit of the owner. In the fold of Jesus, it's just the opposite. God slaughtered the Shepherd for the sake of the sheep. **"I will shepherd the flock with justice. {23} I will**

**place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. {24} I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken.”** David was long dead when these words were spoken. On his way to the cross Jesus told his disciples: **“I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”** Jesus wants us to feed on his word so we have complete trust in his love for us and his sacrifice on the cross. **“All we like sheep have gone astray,”** Isaiah said, **“but the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all.”** Because Jesus did this for us all, we know we are forgiven. We’re sure of where we stand with God. We know where we will end up: **“I know my sheep, and they follow me,”** Jesus says, **“and I give them eternal life; and no one can pluck them out of my hand.”**

This knowledge has a profound effect on the life of the sheep already on this earth. It makes us even dumber. We don’t complain about the little troubles we have, knowing that our troubles are **“achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.”** In this we’re only following in the giant footsteps of the Good Shepherd. **“He was oppressed, he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.”** Let’s follow our Good Shepherd and be dumb sheep. Let’s not talk about what we do for God but boast about what great things God has done for us -- he chose us to be his own. Let’s not talk so much of our own wisdom but quietly listen to the voice of our Good Shepherd. And let’s be quiet about our own troubles, because Jesus silently bore his so we could go to heaven. **“Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”** There we’ll have a thousand tongues to sing his praise. Amen.