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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
April 26, 2015
3rd Sunday after Easter

Scripture Lessons: Ezekiel 34:11-16, John 10:1-18

Hymns: 436; 783; 368; 51 (248:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Ezekiel 34:23-31

I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them—My servant David. He shall feed them and be their shepherd. 24 And I, the Lord, will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken.

25 “I will make a covenant of peace with them, and cause wild beasts to cease from the land; and they will dwell safely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. 26 I will make them and the places all around My hill a blessing; and I will cause showers to come down in their season; there shall be showers of blessing. 27 Then the trees of the field shall yield their fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase. They shall be safe in their land; and they shall know that I am the Lord, when I have broken the bands of their yoke and delivered them from the hand of those who enslaved them. 28 And they shall no longer be a prey for the nations, nor shall beasts of the land devour them; but they shall dwell safely, and no one shall make them afraid. 29 I will raise up for them a garden of renown, and they shall no longer be consumed with hunger in the land, nor bear the shame of the Gentiles anymore. 30 Thus they shall know that I, the Lord their God, am with them, and they, the house of Israel, are My people,” says the Lord God.’

31 “You are My flock, the flock of My pasture; you are men, and I am your God,” says the Lord God. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, Our Risen Lord, fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Security.

In these Sundays following Easter when we are focusing on the blessings of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead we come to this Sunday we call “Good Shepherd Sunday.” A great blessing comes to us in knowing that because our Redeemer lives we have One who continues to care for us in our every need.

This is an important blessing for us as we face the many trials and tribulations and temptations that come upon us during our walk through this life. There are times in everyone’s life when the issues, or the dangers which we are facing would overwhelm us if we were on our own. We are well aware of the frailty of humans. The rulers of this world, or the scientists, or the rich and powerful of this world, they are all still dust. We need someone more who can bring us a real assurance of help and deliverance. Jesus our Risen Savior is --

THEME: The Good Shepherd Who Brings Security to His Flock.

I. The Security Found in the Covenant of Peace.

Ezekiel was a prophet in exile. He had been taken into the Babylonian captivity, and in his prophetic ministry he disabused the people of the Jews of the false hopes of deliverance that many others were encouraging. He made it clear to them that Jerusalem and its temple were not a sign for hope that things were going to turn around for the Jews and they would soon return to their homeland to continue life as they had known it. Hope and security were not to be found there. They would soon be laid waste and such false hopes would crumble with the walls of Jerusalem. Ezekiel directed them to the Promised Messiah. Our text provides us with that reassuring picture with which we are all familiar from the 23rd Psalm.

Ezekiel 34:23-25a I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them—My servant David. He shall feed them and be their shepherd. 24 And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken. 25 “I will make a covenant of peace with them.”

This is hope and security that is found in the Son of David who God would send into the world as the one true Shepherd of the sheep. This Shepherd would be the Servant of the Lord, a term for the Messiah that was introduced by Isaiah a century earlier. He would come and be a prince among them. He would rule them with His love and grace. This Shepherd would care for them and feed them with the spiritual food they so much needed for true life and salvation. We see how Jesus fulfilled all this in His ministry as He taught the people concerning the kingdom of God. The words of our Savior recorded for us in the gospels still brings us the spiritual food we need to nourish our souls. More than this, all the Word of God was established as faithful and true in Jesus as He fulfilled all that the prophets had written and as He empowered the apostles to take the gospel out into all the world and to bring its message to every sinner, that we might know Jesus as our Good Shepherd.

The Good Shepherd is the One who established the covenant of peace which God promised in our text. This is the central message of the gospel which Jesus connected to His identity as the Good Shepherd.

John 10:14-18 “I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. 15 As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. 16 And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.

17 “Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. 18 No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.”

Jesus laid down His life for us to fulfill this covenant of peace. The law of God demanded the death penalty, that we die for our sins, that we be condemned to eternal death with the devil in hell. The

devil is that wolf who would assault the flock of God and kill and scatter the flock. Jesus met the foe head on. Jesus defeated the devil by taking on Himself our flesh and blood to become our brother, and then our Champion. He then took our sin in His own body and bore our sin to the cross. Jesus, our Good Shepherd gave His life for the sheep. He paid the price for our sin, suffering the death penalty in our place, and thereby secured our peace with God. This peace became evident when Jesus took up His life again. In His resurrection we have the presentation of life, life for Jesus, and eternal life for the flock of God. The covenant of Peace is permanently in place. Our future in this life and the next is secure.

What we are talking about is --

II. Our Security in a Dangerous World.

The image presented in our text alludes to situations that would be perilous indeed for the flock of sheep without the presence of the Good Shepherd.

Ezekiel 34:25-27a “I will make a covenant of peace with them, and cause wild beasts to cease from the land; and they will dwell safely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. 26 I will make them and the places all around My hill a blessing; and I will cause showers to come down in their season; there shall be showers of blessing. 27 Then the trees of the field shall yield their fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase.

For the Jews in exile this image presented them with the hope of returning to Judah without the dangers that the evil of the land had brought upon them. Indeed they were assured that the Lord’s blessing would return to them and to their homeland. What a joy to be assured that what lies in one’s future is that “**there shall be showers of blessing!**”

That is the assurance the Good Shepherd continues to bring to us today. We can go forward in this life with God’s assurance that we will dwell safely in this wilderness. The dangers that fill this world because of the corrupting power of sin in nature, all the illness, the storms, the earthquakes, all the dangers that may surround us, they are all in the control of the Good Shepherd. He provides for our every need. He keeps us in His care. But what of the enemies that

would still attack the flock, those who see us as sheep for the slaughter? The Lord assures us that we are in the secure care of the Good Shepherd.

Ezekiel 34:27b - 29 They shall be safe in their land; and they shall know that I am the LORD, when I have broken the bands of their yoke and delivered them from the hand of those who enslaved them. 28 And they shall no longer be a prey for the nations, nor shall beasts of the land devour them; but they shall dwell safely, and no one shall make them afraid. 29 I will raise up for them a garden of renown, and they shall no longer be consumed with hunger in the land, nor bear the shame of the Gentiles anymore.

This assurance is important for us to comprehend. We know persecution is still going on in the world. We know that right now in the world there are many who are actively searching out Christians and attacking them, and even killing them. We know that in our own country the animosity toward Christians who are faithful to the Word of the Lord is increasing. It can make many tentative in testifying to their faith. It can make us feel nervous about speaking up about issues where the Word of the Lord is clear, including the very gospel of Christ as being the only way to salvation. So what does this mean for us? Are we as secure as the Lord would lead us to believe? Let us consider the Apostle Paul's words in Romans 8.

Romans 8:35-39 "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 As it is written:

'For Your sake we are killed all day long;
We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.'

37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. 38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Yes, we are marked by the world as sheep for the slaughter, but whatever they do to us, "Take they our life, goods, fame, child and wife Let these all be gone they yet have nothing won, the Kingdom

ours remaineth” (TLH 262:4). Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. The Good Shepherd keeps us in His hands, and we are secure. We are --

III. Secure in our Relationship with God.

The nature of that relationship is shaped by the Lord’s loving care for us as it is revealed in Jesus as our Good Shepherd.

Ezekiel 34:30-31 30 “‘Thus they shall know that I, the LORD their God, am with them, and they, the house of Israel, are My people,’ says the Lord GOD. 31 ‘You are My flock, the flock of My pasture; you are men, and I am your God,’ says the Lord GOD.”

We note that it is the LORD, who reveals Himself to us in grace that speaks to us our relationship with Him. It is the covenant God who sent His Son to be our Redeemer and our Shepherd that assures us of the close knit relationship we have with our God. He tells us that He is **our** God, and that we are **His** people. He owns us in a personal, familial way. At the same time He assures us that He is the One who is not only in control as our God but the One who as God is able to keep us safe. We are the flock of His pasture, He is watching over us and caring for us. We are men, frail and vulnerable, as weak as all humans are. He is God the LORD who is all powerful, indeed powerful to **save!** We are safe and secure in our relationship with Him because of Jesus our Good Shepherd, and we are safe and secure in life because of our relationship with the Father and His Son, Jesus, our Good Shepherd.

How important this is for us to keep before us as we make our way down paths of this life! We will travel down difficult roads. There will be temptations, and trials, and tribulations and persecutions. We will pass through the valley of the shadow of death. All this we may do without fearing evil because Jesus, the Lord is our Shepherd who keeps watch over us. He rescues us from sin and death. He protects us from the evil one, and prepares a place for us in the presence of our enemies. We are secure now, here in time and hereafter we shall “dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (Psalm 23)!

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.