

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

May 3, a.D. 2009

John 10: 11 – 18

We have celebrated the mystery of our Lord's resurrection from the dead; although we cannot prove it, nor have empirical evidence or ability to reproduce the experiment of the resurrection, we believe it to be true. We have stood before the graves of our loved ones, often with groans and tears too deep for words, yet still have the certainty that death is no longer our master nor the master of those we bury in the faith, for death's sting is removed, and the grave will give up its prey because Christ lives.

Our comfort in grieving our dead rests firmly on our Lord's resurrection. We belong to the Lord who paid the price for his beloved not with 30 pieces of silver, but through his bloody death and sacrifice. The Lamb of God goes patient on toward his death, grows weak and faint, to slaughter without complaint to offer his spotless life. He gladly suffers all this. Instead of running away from harm and danger he is led into the middle of it and replies to his father, "All this I gladly suffer."

The lamb is also the Shepherd. Although he is one of the sheep, the virgin-born Son of God, willingly lays down his life upon the altar of the cross and then willingly takes up his life again so that the sheep may be feed in heaven's green pastures, drink the still waters, and dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

As certain as the Good Shepherd and has come and willingly laid down his life for the sheep and has taken it up again, there is also a darker certainty that false shepherds will come. False shepherds are called hirelings and are marked by their love of money. At the first sign of danger, it becomes plain to all that they were only in the business of shepherding for themselves.

The false shepherds, who fleece the flock instead of feeding it, will come but they are not alone. Jesus says that wolves will also certainly come. What happens after the hireling is divided from the flock at the first sign of danger? The wolf takes over and devours the flock not at once, but runs into the middle of the flock and divides it further by scattering it. Then he begins to pick off the sheep one by one to devour them. .

The wolf is also called a prowling lion, an ancient serpent or dragon, the father of lies. Whatever he is called, his evil fruit is the same and is witnessed when he divides

Christians. The Good Shepherd has come to gather all his dear sheep into one flock, both Jew and Gentile. One Good Shepherd, one flock. Yet when we look around in the world we can barely count the countless denominations of the church.

The creeds confess one holy and Christian church. If God unites and sin separates, then divisions in the church are scandalous. They come because we still struggle with the sinful flesh, because there are money hungry pastors, sex scandals among clergy and demons that devour the sheep of God. If sin were not in the world, then there would be no divisions in the one true church.

Yet divisions in the church are also necessary. Just as police officers, judges and jailors and doctors are necessary so are divisions. They come because we struggle with sin and so that God's truth can be heard. There is no use for a Saviour when repentance over real sin is never mentioned.

The Good Shepherd has come to make us one with the father. He shows that he is our Good Shepherd on the night he was betrayed and great danger was coming. The temple guards wanted to arrest everybody, Jesus and all his followers. But when the Good Shepherd was arrested he spoke for his beloved so that they could go free and not one of them was lost.

Christ removed everything that separated us from the Father. He didn't run from danger but swallowed it up and rose again. As he united us with the Father, so he unites us with one another. We confess even when we cannot see them. We desire the unity as we desire to be free from sin. The denominations are a scandal to the peace and unity in heaven. The good work begun in us is not yet complete.

We are still at war with the wolf. We are scattered. We still have our weaknesses, our prejudices, our fear. But we must wait. The good work begun in us is not yet complete.

We cannot make the unity. The Lord calls us into one flock. Our desire for unity is good. It is a longing for the removal of all of sins divisions. But we cannot make unity any more than we can make ourselves alive or to make ourselves to stop sinning by saying so. Nor do we have to prove our unity by creating our own oneness when there is no unity. Then we sin. Trying to create something that only God can do is scattering the flock.

It is spiritually dangerous to think that it doesn't matter what we believe as long as we are friendly with one another and love one another. The church built on mutual affection, on man-made feeling, instead of the death and resurrection of the good Shepherd and his word of truth, then we create Unity is not a gushy idea of working together, but it is a bond of peace that only the Spirit can create.

We don't have to prove the unity of the church. Any more than we have to prove the resurrection of Christ and our loved ones who die in the faith. We can still confess one holy and Christian church.

We confess the unity at holy communion. We feed from one bread, drink from one cup even though there are many Christ in his mercy makes us one. One confession of truth, We have each other. We have brothers and sisters that confess and believe the same Christ, the same word of truth. Our unity won't be seen until heaven.

There is no worry of the saints in heaven worrying about different denominations. Soon we will be relieved by that just as the saints in heaven do not worry about denominations. The scattered will be gathered into one flock.

But for now Divisions are necessary. We still struggle with sin. We are still at war in the flesh. It does matter what we teach and believe because doctrine is life. False doctrine is death. This is no game. It is dangerous to teach false things about God.

Our sin, our weaknesses, our selfish desires still divide us.

Worse than being divided from God because of doctrine, is to be divided from God in order to appear that we are united with man. We don't serve our neighbour by ignoring the truth and say that it doesn't matter what you believe or that our unity is based on our feeling and how many hugs we give one another.

Our Lord will return. He will gather all his beloved into one flock. Then the unity will be seen as there is one Christ. Now we have unity at the altar in one confession although we are a small flock

By God's grace we are not alone. We are a small flock. We are united in Christ our Good shepherd whose strong love for us is no match for Satan and the grave. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed.