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“The Judge Is My Shepherd, I Shall Not Fear”

Text: Matthew 25:31-46; Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

I'm going to string some verses from the Bible together for you.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. . . . And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever (Psalm 23:1, 6).

For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand (Psalm 95:7).

What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it (Luke 15:4)?

I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me. . . . The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out (John 10:14, 3).

And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel (Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:6).

And from the Old Testament reading today: *I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord. . . . And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd* (Ezekiel 34:15, 23).

And then there is the hymn we often sing:

*I am Jesus' little lamb, Ever glad at heart I am;
For my Shepherd gently guides me, Knows my need and well provides me,
Loves me everyday the same, Even calls me by my name* (LSB #740 v. 1).

And I could go on, but you get the picture. These are important verses to keep in mind when you hear the words of Jesus that we heard today, when He said:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

That same Good Shepherd throughout all the Scriptures is the Shepherd you will meet on the Last Day. It will not be a stranger or a different Shepherd with a different attitude toward you. It's not that Jesus is one way with you now, as a caring shepherd, but another way with you then, as a stern judge - no! The same one who sought you out, cared for you, provided for you, protected you, and rescued you all through your life now will do so at the end as well. He is the one you will come before on the Last Day. And He will separate the sheep from the goats because He knows who are the sheep and who are the goats. He knows those who are His and those who are not. He knows you by name.

He knows. For He baptized you. He gave you His Spirit. He spoke to you through His Word and Absolution. He fed you, placing into your mouth His very Body and Blood. And how many times. He knows you. You belong to Him. And so on the Last Day, He will put you on His right hand, as He is on the Father's right hand. For you are sons of God in the Son of God. By faith. By the fact that you are His child. You are Jesus' little Lamb.

And then comes the evidence. Did you notice that? It comes after the separation, not before. It is not the basis for the separation. It cannot be. For Scripture also says:

By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Romans 3:23-24).

And [Abraham] believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6).

Or as we sang in the hymn today:
*Salvation unto us has come By God's free grace and favor;
Good works cannot avert our doom, They help and save us never.
Faith looks to Jesus Christ alone, Who did for all the world atone;
He is our one Redeemer* (LSB #555 v. 1).

Faith looks to Jesus not just now, but on the Last Day, too. To the One who can - and will - shepherd us from this life to the next.

So you are not a sheep because of what you did. That is a misunderstanding of this text. You are a sheep because of what Jesus did for you. And then what you do comes from that, from faith. For Scripture tells us this too: *So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead* (James 2:17).

Or again, as we just sang:

*Faith clings to Jesus' cross alone And rests in Him unceasing;
And by its fruits true faith is known, With love and hope increasing.
For faith alone can justify; Works serve our neighbor and supply
The proof that faith is living (LSB #555, v. 9).*

So on the Last Day, Jesus points to the works you did as *evidence* of a faith living and active. Works done not to earn forgiveness, but because you are forgiven. As we heard and considered last week: your works are important, and they matter. And your Good Shepherd knows all of them; all the good you're doing, no matter how small. And it is all small, especially compared to the good He did for you! And you won't remember it, or even realize the good you have done. But He does. All of it. For you did these things to Him, for Him, even though you weren't alive when He was, some two thousand years ago. No matter. What you did in faith you did for Him and to Him.

But what is done without faith is no good work. It cannot be. Scripture tells us that *Without faith it is impossible to please God* (Hebrews 11:6). For without faith, all that we do is tainted with sin and not good - not of God - no matter how good it looks to us.

But what about your sins? You have a lot of them! As do I. Where are they on that day? The Shepherd doesn't mention them. Indeed He cannot! Why? Listen to more Scripture:

*He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.
For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward
those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our
transgressions from us (Psalm 103:10-12).*

For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jeremiah 31:34).

So your sins? He doesn't mention them because they're not there! Your sins of commission, your sins of omission, your really big sins, your little sins - not there! They have been forgiven, because they went with your Good Shepherd into the grave with His dead body, and when He rose again on the third day, they stayed there! Dead and buried. So as St. Paul wrote in the Epistle we heard today: *For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ* (1 Corinthians 15:22). Or in other words: you will rise like Him, and you will be like Him. You, perfect and glorified and sinless. Your body, finally, as it was created to be, to live with Him in His kingdom forever.

And so will the Scriptures be fulfilled on that Last Day, all of them, from beginning to end, with (as Ezekiel wrote) the promised Son of David on the throne forever. The One to whom so many cried out: Lord, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us! The Son of David, your Shepherd, on the throne. The Shepherd who is also the Lamb of God, given for you and here given to you. That His life be your life, both now and forever.

What other judge would you want? What better judge could you ask for?

So as I have been saying these past few weeks, do not fear that day, whenever it comes, but look forward to that day with joy! For your Lord is looking forward to that day, you know. For Scripture again tells us: *The Lord has taken away the judgments against you; he has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall never again fear evil. . . . The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing* (Zephaniah 3:15, 17). How incredible! A day of joy for our Lord, too.

That indeed is a day to look forward to. Described for us also in one final Scripture, which we heard on All Saints just a few weeks ago:

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" . . . "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. . . .

*They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore;
the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat.
For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd,
and he will guide them to springs of living water,
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes"* (Revelation 7:13-14, 16-17).

That is the future, that is the promise, that awaits you. Spoken by God throughout time. Recorded in Scripture for you. Accomplish by Him.

So come now and once again receive the Body and Blood of the Lamb - your Lamb, who is also your Shepherd and your Judge. Or to paraphrase the Scripture we started this whole sermon off with: *The Judge is my Shepherd, I shall not fear*. For know that He who shepherds and feeds you now is He who will shepherd and feed you forever.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.