

26 January 2003  
Commemoration of St. Titus, Pastor  
and Sanctity of Life Sunday

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“The Gospel of Life”  
Text: Matthew 24:42-47

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

***“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom His Master has set over His household, to give them their food at the proper time?”***

Feeding the household, feeding the flock, is the task that our Lord Jesus Christ has entrusted to His pastors. From the end of John’s Gospel, with Jesus’ threefold instruction to Peter to ***“Feed my lambs,”*** down to the current day exhortation to pastors in their installation liturgies, **feeding the flock** is the task that our Lord Jesus Christ has entrusted to His pastors. It sounds so easy. What a simple thing to do.

Perhaps at times is it. But what about those times when it isn’t? Jesus makes no exceptions, but in fact, says, ***“Blessed is that servant whom His Master will find so doing when He comes.”*** And just before this He has said that He is coming like a thief in the night. There are no exceptions.

Feed them, even when they don’t feel like eating.  
Feed them, even when food is hard to come by.  
Feed them, no matter what the cost.  
Feed them, even when they want different food, “better” food, or junk food.  
Feed them, not only when it is convenient, but at the proper times.  
Feed them, for that is how important and precious they are to Me, Jesus says.

And feed them with what? The food that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, Himself has given, the food that Jesus Himself is. The Gospel of Life. The Gospel that in the midst of this world that is dying, and that has been deceived into embracing death, there is life. Life in the One who laid down His life for us, and then defeated death is His resurrection. His Gospel is ***“the words of eternal life.”*** (John 6:68) He is ***“the bread that comes down from Heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.”*** (John 6:50) He is the One who has come ***“for the life of the world.”*** (John 6:33) ***“And they said to Him, ‘Sir, give us this bread***

***always.***” (John 6:34) And so to do that He has given pastors, and charged them to feed His flock with this food. With Himself. We remember Titus as such a one today. And while the Scriptures sometimes use different names, such as we heard today, calling pastors “***elders,***” or “***overseers***” – it is one and the same office. With the same charge. “***Feed my lambs.***” Do not expect them to find this food themselves. Do not expect them to feed themselves. Feed them. It sounds so easy. What a simple thing to do.

But why then, the haunting question of Jesus, “***Who then is the faithful and wise servant?***” It is a question we could very well ask today for there is a different gospel being preached in our world today – not the Gospel of Life, but the gospel of death. And so many are dying. For life is no longer seen as something to be cared for and fed, but as pure biology; pure science; to be researched and used, poked and prodded, manipulated and replicated, for we want to control life and death ourselves. We want to create life, and we want the right to be able to end it whenever we want. And you know all the many ways that is being done today, to people of all ages, in hospital beds, clinics, and garbage cans all across America. . . . But, we are told in this new “gospel,” death is not a problem, it is in fact, the answer! And these answers are given nice-sounding names to make them sound like good answers.

+ And so abortion is called choice – *the answer* to make sure there are no unwanted children.

+ Killing older people is called Death with dignity – *the answer* to pain and to make sure our precious health care dollars go where they are *really* needed, and are not sucked up by those who are not worthy.

+ Cloning to create spare body parts is called medical research and advancement – *the answer* to give us all a better quality of life.

+ Killing babies with birth defects is called “screening,” like you’re applying for a job – *the answer* for those who do not want to be so burdened.

+ There is even an abortion pill now, called the “morning after” pill – *the answer* to your irresponsible behaviour, so that you can get rid of a life which may or may not be there, just as simply as taking a couple of aspirins to get rid of a hangover.

We’ve got it all figured out, don’t we? This is the gospel of the world. Thanks be to Satan.

But what is perhaps even more distressing than all of this is that this *same attitude* toward

physical life has been carried over to, and applied, to spiritual life as well. A little leaven leavens the *whole* lump, after all. And so in much the same way, there is another different gospel that we are hearing today, which is preaching to us that spiritual death is not a problem, it is in fact, *the answer*. Only it is not put that crassly – it too is given nice-sounding names and so this doctrine *sounds like* a good answer.

+ And so allowing people to worship false gods is called **diversity** – *the answer* to Christians imposing their beliefs onto everyone else.

+ Insisting that all religions are the same and lead to the same god is called **respecting our cultural differences** – *the answer* to Christian exclusivism and bigotry.

+ Reducing God to a lowest common denominator, so that everyone really believes in Him, just by different names, and so everyone will go to Heaven is called **tolerance** – *the answer* to those judgmental Christian, who dare to think that not everyone will be saved.

+ There are even worship services for this different gospel popping up all over, called in the name of **unity** – *the answer* to all our problems and differences, so that we all just get along.

This is the gospel of the world. Thanks be to . . .

***“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom His Master has set over His household, to give them their food at the proper time?”***

That is a question just as haunting and urgent today as ever before. For the gospel of death is being proclaimed just as loudly and broadly today as it has ever been. And many are hearing it, and believing it. And that gospel gives what it says – namely, death. Physical and spiritual. Now and eternally. . . . And so Jesus tells His pastors, ***“Feed my lambs.”*** Feed them My Gospel, the Gospel not of death, but of life! Feed them My words, which do not deceive, but which are truth and life. Feed them Me, My body and My blood; give them this bread of life. Feed them, for My Gospel also gives what it says – namely, Life.

All of you have been fed with this Gospel of Life, by faithful pastors down through the years. Some of you by many, some of you by only a few. But you have been fed and are here to be fed more. You have been fed and so have already begun living a life that will never end. You have been fed and made a lamb of God, not by your own reason or strength, but by the Holy Spirit who called you, and by your brother and Saviour Jesus Christ, who laid down His life on the cross for you. You have been fed by this Gospel of

Life.

+ This Gospel which gives to you **life** because all your **death**-dealing sins have been forgiven and taken off of you, from the least of them to the greatest of them.

+ This Gospel which gives to you **life** because the **death** sentence you deserved was given not to you, but to your substitute, Jesus of Nazareth, on the cross.

+ This Gospel which gives to you **life** because Jesus' tomb of **death** is empty, and therefore even though we will one day die, we too will rise to life again with our Saviour.

+ This Gospel which gives to you **life** because the master of **death**, Satan, has been defeated and bound, once and for all, and what awaits us now is the glorious inheritance of Heaven.

This is the Gospel of the Lord. Thanks be to God!

And this Gospel of life has been given to you, and you have ***“tasted and seen that the Lord is good.”*** (Psalm 34:8) St. Titus was a pastor who faithfully proclaimed this Gospel of Life and gave these gifts of our Lord, and there have been many who have followed in his footsteps. . . . And yet still there are many who are dying, caught up in the gospel of this world, the gospel of death; caught up in the lies, the deception, the false promises of Satan. Looking for answers where there are none to be found. And they are lost. And you know, the thing about being lost is that nobody *tries* to get lost; nobody *wants* to be deceived. Yet it happens. And many are hungry.

***“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom His Master has set over His household, to give them their food at the proper time?”*** You know the answer to that question, for you have been fed. It is our Lord Jesus Christ, who came not to be served, but to serve. Who came to lay down His life for His sheep. Who feeds us in green pastures and still waters. Who gives us life. It is our Lord Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who still feeds you today through His undershepherds, that you may be fed and filled, that you may know the ***“breadth and length and height and depth”*** of His love for you, that you may live and not die.

***“Feed my lambs.”*** It sounds so easy, yet how many do not know? How many are hungry? How many are dying? Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, eat and drink deeply of these gifts of your Lord, receiving His gifts of forgiveness and life. And live that life that you have been given, feasting on these gifts, and testifying of them to others. That they too may eat and drink. That they too may hear the Gospel of Life and truth. That

they too may come into the house of the Lord, and not die but live, both now and forever.

***“Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”***

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

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds steadfast in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen