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Pentecost 3

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“A Shepherd Unlike the Others”

Text: Matthew 9:35-10:20; Romans 5:6-15; Exodus 19:2-8

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

***When [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.***

They came to Him, because they didn't know where else to go. They came to Him, because they had no place else to go. They came to Him, because they knew He cared, and He had what they needed.

***He taught in their synagogues.*** Not what the world said was true, but the truth of God's Word. Not the latest fad, but what is eternal and lasting. Not what they wanted to hear, but what they needed to hear.

***He proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom.*** Not an earthly kingdom, but an eternal kingdom. Not a kingdom that is good news for some, but good news for all. A kingdom where the king served the people, not the other way around.

***And He healed every disease and every affliction.*** There was nothing beyond His power, nothing He could not heal. Whatever ailed them - physically, mentally, spiritually - He had the remedy. He was the remedy. He even forgave sins. The most deadly disease of all. Afflicting every man, woman, and child in the history of the world. And with a near 100% mortality rate. Only two men ever escaping that fate - Enoch and Elijah.

So they came to Him, the one who had come to them, and *for* them. Here was the shepherd they needed. The one they had been looking for and waiting for. The one prophesied, and now here. That's why Matthew used the phrase he did, that the people ***were like sheep without a shepherd***. He didn't think up that phrase himself - it is from the Old Testament. And three times we find it there . . .

**First**, when Moses was about to die. Because that's the first thing that happens to shepherds, even good ones like Moses, that can cause the sheep to be without a shepherd - **they die**. Moses had led the people out of Egypt and to the border of the Promised Land, but now he was about to die. So he prays to the Lord to *appoint a man over the congregation who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them*

*out and bring them in, that the congregation of the Lord may not be as sheep that have no shepherd* (Numbers 27:16-17). That man would be Joshua, who would lead them through the waters of the Jordan and into the Promised Land. Joshua, a prophecy, a foreshadowing of Jesus and what He would do for us. Jesus would be the prophet greater than Moses, for He would die but not stay dead but defeat death, and so also be greater than Joshua, leading us into an even greater Promised Land.

The **second** time that phrase is used is because those who were supposed to be shepherding Israel were instead **lying** to them. Instead of speaking God's Word truthfully, the prophets were saying what the king wanted to hear and what the people wanted to hear, that nothing was wrong, all is well, don't worry. But this left the people **harassed and helpless** for they had no Word of God to defend them against the deception, false beliefs, misleading, shame, and despair of the devil. So the people were *scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd* (1 Kings 22:17).

Until **finally**, because those who were supposed to be shepherds were **selfish**, only feeding themselves, neglecting the sheep, and ruling over them harshly, so that they *were scattered, because there was no shepherd . . . because there was none to search or seek for them* (Ezekiel 34:5-6), the Lord said through the prophet Ezekiel that He would come and do it Himself. So the sheep would have a shepherd - a good one, a faithful one, an eternal one. Who would defeat death, speak the truth, and have compassion on the sheep and care for them. So that day in Galilee, the Old Testament was being fulfilled, and the New Testament begun. The new, when the Shepherd would send out laborers *to do as He did*.

And we heard that also today, as Jesus sends out the twelve with His authority. He sends them only *to the lost sheep of the house of Israel* - not because He's racist! - but because they're not ready yet. They're still learning. He will soon send them to all the world, to all people, and with all authority (Matthew 28:19), but they need to learn first. They need to learn (1.) to rely on the Word of God alone, and (2.) of the opposition they will face. For their fate will be even harder than the people! They won't just be harassed and helpless, they will be *as sheep in the midst of wolves!* Rejected by their own people, and dragged before governors and kings. **But the Word and authority they have will be enough.** And they will not be alone. The one who sent them and His Spirit will be with them. **Jesus never wants His sheep to be without a shepherd.**

But not just shepherds - *faithful* shepherds. There is no shortage of those who would be shepherds, but are in reality wolves. Who do not speak the truth of God's Word, but the so-called truths of the world. Who do not serve, but seek to be served. And so who leave the sheep harassed and helpless, confused and vulnerable to the attacks and assaults of the evil one, who is more than happy to seize them as prey. And as you look around at our world today, this is what you see. Look at how many have been taken captive to false teaching, deceptive philosophy, and harmful teaching. How many are starved and thirsting for life, how many have been hurt and left behind, how many have been forgotten and

left to fend for themselves? And we are not immune. We can be taken in, too, and curved in on ourselves, and our minds and hearts captivated and mesmerized by sin and what it promises us. But in the end, these don't give us what they promise. We, too, are left harassed and helpless. These were no shepherds.

But just as in Galilee that day, here too, a shepherd has come to us, with the truth of His Word, a kingdom that is good and eternal, and to heal every disease and affliction. A Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep, and then rose from the dead. A Shepherd to wash us, feed us, and forgive us. To start His work of renewal in us now, and complete it on the Last Day, when every disease and affliction that burdens us now will be left in the grave, and we will rise to a new life. He will do it for only He can do it. The Son of God in human flesh. Jesus of Nazareth. That as we heard, as one man got us into this mess, one man would get us out. And it's not a politician, judge, scientist, AI, or anything else in this world. Only Jesus.

And like the disciples Jesus sent out, we too have to learn that **He and His Word are enough**. It's tempting to look to other things in this world to solve our problems or make things right, and while God certainly uses people and things in this world to do His work, it is **HE** that is doing it through them - providing, caring, saving. Working all things together for the good of His people and His Church (Romans 8:28). So we'll use the things of this world, we'll rejoice in people and their accomplishments, but we'll trust only in Jesus, our Shepherd, and look to Him for all we need.

And we, who the devil wants us his prey, we'll pray. (The other kind of pray!) We'll pray, as Jesus said, ***for the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. For the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.*** That there is a shortage of pastors and other church workers in our world today is not news, but apparently it has always been so. Even in Jesus' day. Today, there are more prestigious careers, better paying jobs, and callings where you don't have to work holidays and weekends! It's a miracle anyone wants to work in the church today! No really! *Literally*. **It is the work of God** in the hearts of men and women, just as it is a miracle that all of you are here today. You didn't come on your own - you were called by the Holy Spirit and He worked in you the miracle of faith in Jesus.

And you, too, Jesus sends. To your friends and families, your workplaces and schools, to love and serve and care; to forgive and mercy and do good. And maybe even to tell people that there is a Good Shepherd who has come for them. Who is here for them. And who cares for them. That there is truth in this world of falsehood and lies. That there is healing for what ails and afflicts us. And that there is life in Him. A life not even death can end. It may not be easy to do that - to live that way and speak Jesus. In fact, Jesus promised it wouldn't! That if they hated Him, they will hate you. That if they persecuted Him, they will persecute you. But have no fear of them and do not be anxious, He says. *For he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world* (1 John 4:4). And you belong to

Him. You are His *treasured possession*.

So you always have a place to go. You have a faithful Shepherd. He is here for you in water which is more than mere water, words which are more than mere words, and bread and wine which is more than mere bread and wine. For in these is Him and His gifts, His forgiveness, life, and salvation. And never will you find greener pastures, stiller water, or greater protection. That you be not just sheep, but *His* sheep. That you not be harassed and helpless, but comforted and cared for. That you never be alone. For everywhere you go, He goes, even to the grave. Until He comes again in glory to raise you up, just as He was raised up, and there will be one flock, and one Shepherd, and everything new in His kingdom which has no end.

That as we just sang,

*That in these gray and latter days,  
There may be those whose life is praise,  
Each life a high doxology  
To Father, Son, and unto Thee* (LSB #834).

To the Shepherd unlike any other.

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

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