

Mid-week Lent III  
St. Mark 14:26-52

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

The prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel had spoken against the shepherds of Israel and Judah. These men—prophets, priests, and kings—whom God had set up to lead His people, care for them, feed them with His Word were not seeing to the tasks to which He had sent them. So He declares woe upon them.

Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock. The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them. (Ezekiel 34:2b-4)

"Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture!" says the LORD. Therefore thus says the LORD God of Israel against the shepherds who feed My people: "You have scattered My flock, driven them away, and not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for the evil of your doings," says the LORD. (Jeremiah 23:1-2)

Because they have done this, God declares that He will be their shepherd. (cf. Ezekiel 34:23; Micah 5:2) In a stable outside the little town of Bethlehem, that Shepherd is born. Conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary, Jesus is God-with-us, the Shepherd promised of old. He is the one who will fulfill the promise made through the prophet Ezekiel:

"Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day. And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land; I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, in the valleys and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them in good pasture, and their fold shall be on the high mountains of Israel. There they shall lie down in a good fold and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down," says the Lord GOD. "I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick; but I will destroy the fat and the strong, and feed them in judgment." (Ezekiel 34:11-16)

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who feeds His people with the pure Word. He guards and protects them. He gives them everything they need to support this body and life. This you confess as you confess the creed, speak the Lord's Prayer, and recite the Ten Commandments and meanings. Jesus is and was everything the prophets, priests, and kings who came before never were and what those who come after Him never can be.

But it wasn't just God's coming in the flesh by which He accomplished this.

Jesus' life was one of hardship. You Christians have reaped the same rewards as He had for the

kind of life He lived. He lived a life of perfect obedience to His own law. You bear His name upon your brow and heart; you are claimed by Him. He was mocked and scorned for His life. You are mocked and scorned for being His. He suffered and died as a result, you might say, of disrupting the religious status quo. You are constantly under the threat of death, and many of your brothers and sisters in Christ have given their lives for the confession of faith in Christ, even to this day. Your life as a Christian is hard for the sake of Jesus Christ; His life was immeasurably more difficult.

But His difficult life was one He endured willingly for you. You are a sheep, having been scattered, as it were, under the false pretenses of those who would teach you falsely about God and His Christ. Daily, you are bombarded with false messages of salvation from left and right, front and behind, in your minds and from those whom you encounter. It's enough to make one run away screaming in confusion and delusion. To what do you run? Perhaps it's the latest fad or something that makes you feel comfortable or relaxed. Whatever it is, off you go, running from Jesus.

His sheep still scatter. Jesus' life of hardship, suffering, and death for you resulted in the scattering of the sheep, too—this time, for all of the right reasons, not the false teaching of the deceitful shepherds of the past. After Jesus and the disciples had celebrated the Passover meal, that they sang a hymn and made their way to Gethsemane. "All of you will be made to stumble this night," Jesus told them—made to stumble.

The sheep will scatter—the disciples will stumble—because the Good Shepherd will be struck. "I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered."

Sorrowful to the point of death—He was looking His own death squarely in the eyes—He goes off to pray in solitude. Mark doesn't tell us everything, but you know what His prayer was. "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will...O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done." (Matthew 26:39, 42)

Who wouldn't sorrow over all that is going to happen, if you knew it was going to happen? I speak not merely of Christ's crucifixion, but of His entire Passion—the binding that will happen, the beating and being spat upon that will happen, and even the scattering of the sheep. It's enough to make a grown man cry. These things must happen, though, and they will be made to stumble.

It's a symptom of this fallen nature. Jesus is a pretty neat guy, if you get to know Him, learn from Him, and receive from Him. You wouldn't want Him bound, struck, and killed. You may even try to get in the way when He says that it will happen (cf. Mark 8:32)—that it MUST happen. And even knowing that it will happen, when it does happen, in fright you scatter.

But these things must happen, Jesus declared. And the hour is come.

It is enough! The hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand.

Judas, that wolf in sheep's clothing, arrives in the garden with the guard, and betrays Jesus with a kiss. The guard laid their hands on Jesus and took Him. They bound Him and led Him to the chief priests and scribes to be put on trial. Along the way, they beat Him bloody. Not even on the cross yet, not even before the Praetorian guard yet, Jesus is already shedding His blood for you.

It's a gruesome sight to behold, and it's only going to get worse. This is one area where I give Mel Gibson high praise for his movie about Christ's Passion—it's violent in much the same way that Jesus

endured violence. And if you watch it, you will be tempted to scatter your looks away. You can hardly bear to watch Jesus—even if just an actor—undergo the treatment that you for your sins deserve. One viewing is enough—more than enough, perhaps—for some.

And the disciples flee. “Then they all forsook Him and fled.” Were you there, you would high tail it away, too, fearful for your own life, frightened over what is happening to your teacher. Though you may have said like Peter, “Even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not be,” you, too, would forsake Him, and even deny Him thrice before the rooster crowed.

But the Shepherd does not deny you. He has not, nor will He ever. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, not merely for being everything the shepherds of the past were not, but because, as Jesus put it, “I lay down my life for the sheep...The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” (John 10:15, 11) Jesus, the Good Shepherd, must give His life for the sheep, for in His life given for them—for you—they have redemption, life, and forgiveness. No, this Good Shepherd doesn’t deny you; though all would forsake Him and flee, He goes steadfastly to the cross...for all—for you.

The Good Shepherd doesn’t deny you. Though all forsake Him and scatter, He still gathers those who believe in Him. His suffering and crucifixion are frightening and life-threatening events, even to this day, but Jesus has suffered and died for you, that you may be forgiven, and live as one of His own. It was on a dark, Good Friday, as Jesus was lifted up on a cross, that He drew all men to Himself. (cf. John 12:32)

Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day. I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick... (Ezekiel 34:11-12, 16)

Though scattered, you are drawn to and into the Lord, Jesus Christ in His crucifixion, because you are covered in the blood that He shed there. On the cross, He sought you out, lost, driven away, broken, and sick—all sin—and He found you, brought you back, bound you up, and strengthened you, all by grace, without any worthiness or merit in you, all because of His fatherly, divine goodness and mercy. This speaks volumes about your God and His love for you.

And in order that you may be His own, He rose again from the dead that your place in eternity would be secure. Jesus lived, died, and lives again, and you are in Him so that in Him you live, die, and live again. Jesus gathers you back to Himself, who would, for myriad, selfish, sinful reasons, abandon, deny, and forsake Him—and His gathering you is accomplished by the forgiveness of your sins, which He won for you as He was struck and pierced on the tree of the cross. This is the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ for you.

Jesus was incarnate, was born, was betrayed, captured, and struck, was crucified, and was buried for you. His death for sin is your death to sin. The forgiveness He won on the cross as He spilled His blood covers your sin, even the sin of forsaking Him. To you, the blood of the Lamb was applied for life and you were declared righteous as you were washed in the water and the Word, and it is your daily sign and seal of a life redeemed and gathered from the scattering your Old Man prefers. For by that water, blood, and Word, you are the righteousness of God. You are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.