

Misericordias Domini  
St. John 10:11-16

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

"[A] hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them."

It's appropriate, in an ironic way, that this Sunday, Good Shepherd Sunday, falls on the Sunday following Call Day at the two LCMS seminaries. This past week, men who have spent nearly 4 years preparing to become pastors learned where they would first be entering the Holy Ministry. Seminary professors and members of the council of presidents probably told them to emulate the Good Shepherd in their impending ministry, perhaps even including laying down their lives for the sheep.

It's appropriate, in an ironic way, because the predilection for these men, as it has been for pastors since Adam, is to be more like the hireling than the Good Shepherd. The sheep are under constant barrage from the wolf, and sometimes those wolves are in sheep's clothing. These pastors are charged with defending their flocks from the attacks of the wolf. For someone so new in the office—even despite the preparation from the Lord's Church and Jesus Himself—this is no easy task; it's no easy task for any shepherd of a local flock, but time does give him some other tools and wisdom with which to combat the foe in the name of Jesus Christ.

You see, that foe, the wolf is always attacking the flock, and his attacks come from without and within.

Attacks from without are probably easier to defend against. They're certainly easier to identify, and the sheep are generally more likely to keep in line with the shepherd's defense. An event or person who might otherwise have a detrimental effect on a congregation, who is speaking against or making unorthodox demands on the congregation, must be rebutted, and the shepherd is the lead agent in that rebuttal, and the sheep usually follow their shepherd in this defense.

Attacks from within, however, are different. Here is how the wolves in sheep's clothing act. Some new program or Bible Study series or songs are suggested to the pastor. He reviews them, even seeking input from colleagues, and rejects them because they are not clear enough or heterodox or even heretical. Of course, that's going to cause waves through the congregation, so maybe he acquiesces instead. Now, his flock scatters from the truth, having gone down the road of false or unclear teaching.

That is the method of the hireling. He cares more for his well-being, and that of his family, than the salvation of his flock. I suppose, in part, you can't blame him for his concern, but Jesus did say, "[D]o not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell," and, "Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 10:28, 32-33) This modern hireling might think he's caring for the sheep, but he does them a great disservice. He has allowed the wolf entry in to the sheep pen; the sheep will then deny the true Christ.

The frightening thing about the attacks from within is that they are equal in number, if not more numerous, than the attacks from without. A Christian may cry, "I am persecuted," as they feel the attacks from without, but the truth of the matter is that even in their very being—their fallen nature—they are always attacking the same faith that they espouse and which they claim is under persecution from the attacks from without.

Dear people—deer sheep of the Shepherd's pasture, at any moment, any one of you could act

out as the wolf in sheep's clothing. The devil, the world, and your sinful nature are always at work to destroy you and the fellowship in which you have a part. And you are a means by which these seek your overthrow. The wolf is always at work, and the hireling would rather flee, seeing the wolf coming, than confront it; this fleeing is from the true Christ and His doctrine.

A good shepherd, however, kills the wolf. A good shepherd stands upon the truth, teaching the sheep the truth, and proclaims the Law of God to kill the sin within you and the Gospel to give you the forgiveness of sins.

Even at the expense of his own life, a good shepherd will defend the sheep against the attacks of wolves. And that is exactly what THE Good Shepherd did.

The wolf has attacked God's church from the very beginning. In the beginning, as Adam and the woman gathered around the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil—their church, as Luther put it—the wolf was there, though his presence was more crafty than that as a wolf. The serpent spoke to the woman and tricked her. Her husband, much like a hireling, remained silent, let her eat, then took some himself and ate; Adam should have crushed the serpent, instead of allowing it to lie to Eve.

But the New Adam came along at just the right time. Jesus was conceived and born, the perfect man, everything Adam was supposed to be, and more, for He is also very God. After three decades of roaming the regions of Galilee and Judea, teaching and healing and raising the dead, Jesus makes His way to Jerusalem, the city of the Temple and the sacrifices. There, He would be crucified, the Good Shepherd giving His life for the sheep, but He didn't simply just die. His death destroyed death; His sacrifice, while it bruised His heal, crushed the head of the serpent (cf. Genesis 3:15), and the wolf was killed. The devil, the world, and your sinful flesh are still always at work to confound you, to destroy you, and to break the bonds of fellowship with the other sheep in this place, but Jesus has overcome that by His death and resurrection.

Oh, yes, Jesus rose again from the grave on the third day. He overcame the sharpness of death for the sheep, even as He had removed the fangs from the wolf of death. And He has overcome the sting of the grave. The sheep still plot against him, the hirelings still flee, but the Good Shepherd is ever true. By His blood, He has defeated the wolf—whether that is the attacks from without, within, the devil, the world, and even your own sinful flesh—and given you the victory. That is to say, He has forgiven you for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.