

The Seventeenth Sunday After Pentecost – 2020

(Upon the dedication of a statue of Christ as the Good Shepherd as a memorial to the Rev. Eugene R. Paulus – the first pastor of Christ the King Lutheran Church of Redlands)

Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32

Philippians 2:1-18

Matthew 21:23-32

Jesus is a pastor, *the* pastor. The incarnate Son of God said this: “I am the Good Shepherd.” Here’s how that translates into Latin: ego sum pastor bonus. The word for shepherd in Latin, that’s where we get the English word “pastor.” Jesus is the pastor par excellence. Jesus is your pastor. He is the One who shepherds the sheep. He is the One who cares for your soul... in a hands-on way.

There is a marvelous painting in the lobby at Loma Linda University Medical Center. It depicts an operating room. The surgeon is totally focused on the task at hand. He and all the assisting physicians are in their surgical garb, the patient is unseen except for the surgical site – properly dressed. What makes the painting arresting is that Jesus is depicted there, standing directly behind the surgeon, guiding his hand. It is a comforting image for all those coming to Loma Linda for surgery. That image is based in reality. God works through vocations, honorable vocations to bless humanity. God certainly is behind the medical arts for He is the One who genuinely brings healing. God works through the farmer and the truck driver and the grocer to feed all of us. God works through teachers to bring knowledge, to form the minds of our youngsters. In a very real sense, God puts out fires through firemen, He keeps us safe through the police, and He loans us money to buy a house through the banker. The examples are endless. He makes glad our heart through the vintner. He brings us our correspondence through the mailman. In the state of California, He brings us good government through the gover— (oh, wait a minute – okay so not all examples are equal).

God Himself shepherds His flock through the called and ordained servant of the Word, through the pastor. The local pastor is the under-shepherd. The Lord Christ is the Good Shepherd. Jesus is your pastor. The pastor of the congregation is a man under authority. He does what He is told. “Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction” (2 Timothy 2:4). On Easter, Jesus instituted the Office of the Ministry. He appeared to His disciples and He proclaimed an empty tomb reality: “Peace be with you.” After saying this He showed them His hands and His side – the proof of eternal peace. Then He breathed on them and said: “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven” (John 20:22-23). Forgiveness, anchored in Jesus death and resurrection – that is the heart of the pastoral office. He sent His newly ordained pastors out to make more disciples. How? By baptizing them, by teaching them the Lord’s own teaching. Baptizing sinners unites them to Christ, unites them to His life, His work, His forgiveness. Teaching the Lord’s own teaching to Christ’s sheep makes them intimate with Him, intimate with His grace, His love. That is how Jesus shepherds His flock; **there is no other way.**

The Word and the Sacraments are the treasure of the church, not because they are historic heirlooms of a distant and revered past. The Word and the Sacraments are the treasure of the

church because that's what Christ uses to unite Himself to you, what He uses to bring you the forgiveness of His blood, what He Himself uses to pastor you as your Good Shepherd. Faith wants to see Jesus. Faith wants to interact with Him. Faith wants to sit at His feet and luxuriate in the wonder of His sacrificial beauty. Faith clings to the Word and the Sacraments because those things are Christ in action, Christ in my life, Christ in the present for me. The Word is glorious and vibrant and living and active – for you, precisely where you live. The Sacrament of Baptism is the wet water in which you walk through this life, a bloody washing of regeneration which tells you who you are, whose you are. You were made new, reborn through water and the Word. You belong to God! The Sacrament of Holy Communion is where you and the Lord of the cross become one flesh. All of His righteousness is received by you as a gift of extraordinary value. We treasure these things and we see Him, by faith, in the midst of this Divine Service to give us heaven itself.

The words which absolution give – Are His who died that we might live;
The minister whom Christ has sent – Is but His humble instrument.
When ministers lay on their hands – absolved by Christ the sinner stands;
He who by grace the Word believes – The purchase of His blood receives.

What a Shepherd – who is active now to tend to His flock! We are extraordinarily blessed. Grace is His ministry; humility and joy and hope – those are the products in the human soul because of Christ's work among us. Courage and faith and spiritual fortitude – the fruit of the Spirit of Christ in the lives of His disciples – that makes us the richest of people. Not all rush to worship the King. Evil is at work in our age. The devil is a roaring lion, ravenous for victims. Satan recruits allies for his dark empire, allies to disparage Christianity, to forge a wedge between Christ and His people. The chief priests and the elders of the people, the religious rulers of the time, came up and they tried to put Jesus in His place: "Listen, bub, just who do you think you are?" "By what authority are you doing these things and who gave you this authority?"

Blind; those people were blind. These things? By what authority am I doing *these things*? You mean like when I changed water in wine, when I cleansed the leprous and made the lame to walk and the blind to see? You mean like when I calmed the storm or fed the 5,000+ using supplies that wouldn't properly feed two hungry boys? These things? By what authority did I raise Jairus' daughter, or the widow of Nain's son, or dead Lazarus? Everybody knew, the Lord taught with otherworldly authority. He shed the light of God's grace onto the most forgotten people. He ate with sinners. The blind hate grace. The blind view grace as a threat to their stature. The spiritually blind call evil good and good evil. Here's the crazy thing – those people who threatened Him, who challenged Him the way a mouse threatens a lion, Jesus loved them. He attempted to pastor them, call them back to Himself. And so, the Lord Christ speaks of John the Baptist.

John was baptizing sinners. John was a pastor, serving under the authority of Christ. Repent! That was John's message. John told all Israel to prepare for the Kingdom of God because it was surely near. Repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins. Prostitutes went out, repentant, and were washed. Tax Collectors and thieves, bandits and liars, adulterers and drunkards and all those who strayed from the God of Israel – they gladly received what a merciful God gave them through John's baptism. The religious elite... they didn't go. They thought that they didn't need

forgiveness – they were spiritual winners all on their own. No humility, no genuine fear of God, no awareness of their true condition. How many in the world, right now, fit that category? How many are desperately lost? How many despise Christ and His Word, Christ and His church, Christ and His blood? Those religious elite, those blind men were so **stubborn** that they refused to see – even when cornered by Christ and His grace. So, Jesus tells a parable.

Two sons – both are told to go into the vineyard and work. The first one tells his father, “up yours, old man, I ain’t going.” But afterward, he changed his mind and went. The second one piously tells his father, “sure thing Pops”, but he never darkens the door of the vineyard. Which of the two did his father’s will? It is a parable of grace – here’s why. The first son was wild, carnal, defiant up front but the Word of grace comes to him, the word of the cross, a Savior, a sacrifice – this grace of God brings divine righteousness (Christ’s righteousness) to those who can’t construct their own, the lowly, the morally bankrupt. The public sinners are the first son. To be sure, the public sinners defied God with their rank behavior but grace beckons them into the vineyard and, ultimately, they joyfully come. The self-righteous are the second son. The self-righteous merely pretend to be allied to the Father. It is all a façade. Inwardly, they despise God’s Son and they stubbornly refuse to come to him. Mark these words – God calls sinners, not the righteous. God heals the sick, not the well. God raises the dead, not the living.

Eugene Paulus was a good shepherd, a good pastor. He did what he was told. He preached the Word in all of its truth and purity. He loved Christ’s flock and served them with the priceless body and blood of the Living God. Pr. Paulus was an instrument of grace in the Father’s hand. Pr. Paulus absolved the broken of their sins. He ministered to the sick and the dying with the power of the Gospel, using the words of the resurrection which breathes hope into Christ’s people. He buried saints. Pr. Paulus taught and confirmed people in our Lutheran teaching. He dispensed God’s grace. And that is precisely what you need. You can’t possibly live without it. You find it here. Grace is located here, the Office of the Ministry is here, The Good Shepherd is here.