

## **Sermon Draft**

**Text: 1 Peter 2:19–25**

**Sermon: “Our Good Shepherd”**

Today is “Good Shepherd Sunday,” the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter. Our Psalm today is naturally is Psalm 23. Along with the Gospel from Jn 10:1–10, the focus is on the Lord, who is our Shepherd. The First Reading from Acts 2:42–47 does not use the shepherd imagery but reminds us that the Good Shepherd has gathered the sheep who hear his voice in the flock of his Church. This Sunday accents the fact that God has raised the Shepherd who was slain to rescue his sheep. Death has no dominion over him nor over those who hear and trust in his voice. Our risen Lord feeds, protects, and guards his sheep who are gathered in his name, and he leads them out of death into life eternal.

Who are the people held up as examples of the good and productive life today? Who is it that we are encouraged to emulate in our own lives? Who comes to mind? Political leaders? Military heroes? Sports figures? Achievers in the fields of science and technology? Accomplished artists? Entertainers?

There are problems, though, with any figure who is made a template or model for our own lives. First, as we have so often discovered, those who look good in the public eye often are deeply flawed with their own moral failures. Do you really want to hold up as an example a successful business person who is convicted of embezzlement or a popular political figure whose life is marred by sexual infidelity to their spouse? There are no perfect examples!

In today's text, Peter speaks of another example. One who is categorically different from any other role model or hero that we might think of within the world that we know. Peter holds up another example, but more than example. The apostle commends to us the Good Shepherd, Christ Jesus. He is an example, but he is so much more. He is the Savior, who suffered for our sins and was raised from death to give life to unruly and straying sheep. So, this morning, we focus our minds and hearts on this Good Shepherd: Our Good Shepherd is our example in suffering and so much more!

Martin Luther reminds us that before Jesus can be our example, he must be our Savior. The pre-Reformation equivalent to those WWJD bracelets that were popular years ago was an “imitation of Christ” piety that saw the essence of faith as living as Jesus lived. Salvation would be acquired by conforming oneself to the pattern of Christ’s perfect life. Over and against this approach, Luther asserted that Jesus is first of all “gift” or “sacrament,” and only secondarily is he an example. Salvation by imitation would still leave us under the Law and in our sin. Luther noted that Jesus is our example not in order to attain to salvation, but in order to live as redeemed and regenerated children of God in this sinful world.

Our Good Shepherd is an example of endurance and more. What is there to endure? Currently we enduring COVID-19. There is unjust suffering! This is suffering that comes not from our sin but from the sin of others. Suffering is expected by those who have done wrong. Criminals have no reason to ask why a punishment is coming to them. This is easily explainable!

The suffering of which Peter speaks issues from actually doing what is good and right in the Lord's eyes. In the early times of the church Christians were martyred for their faith. All the disciples were, only John survived his. You and I do not really know what it's like to suffer for our faith. Hopefully, that will continue but in other parts of the world being a Christian can be a death sentence. I will not list all the ways that Christians are still suffering for their faith, but it still happens.

We call this "cross-bearing," for it is suffering that comes from being identified as one who belongs to the crucified Lord. Christ Jesus is not only an example of endurance, but he is the one who endured for us! When he was insulted, ridiculed, and reviled, he received it. In his will to be our Savior, he endures humiliation at the hands of sinners. Recall the aspects of his passion: betrayed by his friend, spit upon, heckled by soldiers and crowds, and so on. Finally, he endures the shame of the cross. He is unjustly executed as a blasphemer. The One who knew no sin is made sin for us.

His cruciform life is the life to which we are called when he says, “*Take up your cross and follow me.*” We follow in his steps.

Our Good Shepherd is the example of forgiveness for those who do us wrong and more. Forgiveness of sins and reconciliation was his mission. He came into the world to purchase and win the forgiveness of our sins by his death and resurrection. He innocently suffers for our sins and sheds his blood in atonement for our sin. Throughout his life, he is extending this forgiveness to sinners.

He prays from the cross in the midst of his torture: “*Father, forgive them*” (Luke 23:34). Much more than example, Jesus also forgives us. He is a victim who does not victimize. In this world, those who are victims often become victimizers. History is full of examples of how an oppressed people is liberated only to become oppressors. But Jesus does not make victims of those who persecute him. He bears the sin of the world and our individual sin in his body.

By Jesus forgiving us, we are released from sin's power and the compulsion to use our suffering as an excuse for sinning against those who hurt us. Instead, we die to sin and live to righteousness (Romans 6:1–11). Jesus teaches us to pray: **“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us”** (Small Catechism, Fifth Petition; cf. Luke 11:4). Our forgiving follows his forgiving us.

Our Good Shepherd is the example of entrusting our lives into the hands of a faithful and just judge and more. Jesus commends his spirit in the hands of his Father (Luke 23:46). The Jewish “now I lay me down to sleep” prayer (Psalm 31:5) becomes his prayer. In death, yes, even his God-forsaken death for our sins on the cross, he clings to his Father, trusting in him. We follow Jesus' example with, in effect, the same prayer in Luther's Morning and Evening Prayers: **“For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things.”**

But much more than example, Jesus is the shepherd and guardian into whose hands we can commend our souls.

We have the sure and certain knowledge that nothing will divorce us from his love and care, not even the distress of persecution, the tribulations that are inflicted on us. ***“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, ‘For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, not height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*** (Romans 8:35–39). Dying, we live with confidence in this promise!

These things will not snatch us from the hands of our Good Shepherd. What people intend for evil, God works for the good of those who trust in him. The Good Shepherd who began the good work in us by calling us to faith will bring it to completion (Philippians 1:6).

Thank God that we have more than a good example in Jesus Christ!

We have a Good Shepherd, who was put to death for our sins and raised again for our justification. Knowing that he has loved us with such an everlasting love even to the point of being given over to suffer death on the cross, we can live as those who are conformed to his image, pressed (as painful as it may be at times) into that image. He is an example for the life of faith in the Father and love for the neighbor. But even better, he is the Shepherd who has rescued us, reconciling us to his Father, and even now by his Gospel enlivening us to live in him and for him.

Amen