

✠ JOHN 10:22-30 ✠

In Nomine Iesu

Here we have the voice of the Good Shepherd: “My sheep hear my voice, I know them, and they follow me.” Blessed are you who hear the Word of God and keep it (Luke 11:28), for you will receive the reward of eternal life. You belong to the Father just as Jesus belongs to the Father. Jesus heard the Word of God and kept it; even suffering death on the cross because it was the will of the Father that Jesus spill His blood for the redemption of the world. As it is written, “[Jesus Christ] gave Himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father” (Galatians 1:4). And also it is written that His death was according to “the definite plan and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23).

You have been purchased. The blood of Jesus has bought you. You belong to Him. Follow Him. Lay down your life and follow Him. “For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it” (Luke 9:24). Your life is not your own. You belong to another. You are not the master of your fate or king of your castle. You are not at the helm. You are not in control.

It is easy to think that we are in control. It is easy to think that we married this person under our own will. It is easy to think that we have these neighbors because we chose this neighborhood. It is easy to think that we have our lives under control by balancing our checkbooks, driving our cars, or giving money to our church.

But when we think that we are in control then it is not easy to hear or to follow the Shepherd. For His ways are not our ways and His thoughts are not our thoughts. If we think that it is easy then we should check to see if it is the voice of the Good Shepherd that we are following. It is not easy for our old Adam to walk the straight and narrow. It is not easy to walk into certain death. It is not easy to love our enemies. It is not easy to think that God’s will is that we do this rather than that; that we live here rather than there; that we go there rather than here. It is not easy. In truth, it is not possible for our old Adam to do these things; to walk in the ways that Enoch trod.

But these things are not ours. If they are, then we have received our reward in full, and we will not inherit the kingdom of God. But rather, go, sell all that you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven, and come, follow Jesus (Luke 18:22).

“But wait pastor, it is not by works that I inherit the kingdom of heaven, but by faith.” True enough. But are we in danger of making this faith our work? Are we proud of *our* faith? Has faith become the new works-righteousness whereby we earn heaven by *our* having faith? Be on watch, little flock, that the evil one does not bewitch you into thinking that your faith saves you. God saves you by His grace; He calls you His own by His love; He makes you to lie down in green pastures; He gives life to your soul. That is why we cry out to God, “Lord, have mercy! Christ, have mercy! Lord, have mercy!”

It is not because we can show God our faith and say, “See, here, I have faith, let me into your kingdom.” But rather that we fall on our faces crying out: “O Lord, I am not worthy to be

called your child, but by your mercy, for the sake of your Son's innocent suffering and death, forgive my wayward soul and do not let your anger burn against my sinful flesh."

Faith is one thing, the fruit another. Else what then do these words of Christ mean: "Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it" (Matthew 7:26-27), and also, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples" (John 8:31).

Do not be dull in your thinking, St. Paul says, but be wise. In regard to sin be infants, but in your thinking be mature (1 Corinthians 14:20). Or else what our Lord says is of no avail: "To whom much is given much will be required" (Luke 12:48). You have been given the bread of life, the gift of heaven, the very name of God. Do you dare think then that nothing is expected of you? Is that following Jesus? Is that doing unto others what you would have them do unto you?

Quite the contrary; as it is written: "Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness that God requires. Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls" (James 1:19-21). And also it is written: "Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works" (James 2:18). And also this: "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:11).

It is true enough that faith alone saves, and such is the mantra of our beloved Lutheran church: salvation by grace alone through faith alone. But it is not true that the faith by which salvation is grasped is alone. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved. Neglect the Word of God that has been planted in your hearts and it will be choked out by the wickedness of your sins. For it is written, "Whoever says 'I know him' but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:4).

All of this is wrapped up in our Lord's words: "My sheep hear my voice and follow me." The sheep do not merely hear, but they also follow. To these will be given eternal life for they are the true sheep of the true Shepherd. They will never perish because their salvation has been made sure by the perfecting of their faith in love, as it is written, "Whoever keeps His word, in him truly the love of God is perfected" (1 John 2:5).

Therefore we love our enemies. We do good to those who persecute us. We return evil with good. We give beyond measure, never expecting anything in return. We love without being loved. But this does not bother us for the Lord is our Shepherd, we shall not want.

We shall not be in want of love, for we are loved by God. We shall not be in want of peace, for we have the peace of God. We shall not be in want of salvation, for we have the salvation of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And if you find that you have strayed from the straight and narrow; if you have veered from the path of righteousness, if you have been convicted by the Law, turn and confess your sins and God who is faithful and just will forgive your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

For this is the peace of God: that we know that we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus

Christ, our own High Priest, who intercedes for us on our behalf. For His sake God does not reckon our sin to us or count us as guilty of our trespasses, but forgives us and reckons us righteous by the blood of Christ.

Therefore the yoke of Christ is easy for us and His burden is light. In Him is perfect love and righteousness, and therefore, since we have been baptized into Him, His perfect love and righteousness is made ours. He has loved your neighbor perfectly for you. He has given Himself completely for you. The demands of God have been met by the Son of God. We have been graciously given the gifts of Christ's accomplishments: life and salvation.

Hear His voice: "I lay down my life for the sheep, giving myself into death to redeem my people." And follow Him: loving God by confessing your sins, and loving your neighbor by giving yourself for him.

Of you our Lord says, "I know them...I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their Shepherd, and He will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Revelation 7:16-17).

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

✠ AMEN ✠