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## GOSPEL FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

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*John 10:11-16*

*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know My own and My own know Me, just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to My voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.*

1. This Gospel reading, I think, is used on this Sunday because here Christ announces that He will give His life for His sheep, that is, suffer and die; and yet He also shows that He will rise again, because He says, "I have still other sheep, whom I must bring also" [John 10:16], etc. If He is to be and remain a Shepherd for His sheep, then He must not remain in death, as He Himself later explains and interprets in clear words: "I have the power to lay down My life and again to take it" [John 10:18].

2. Now, the Jews certainly heard this parable and sermon of Christ but understood none of it, as the text previously says [John 10:6]. It sounded altogether too strange in their ears that He alone would be the true Shepherd, and yet He was occupied with laying aside His life for His sheep. "What kind of a shepherd would that be," they think, "who dies and lays down his life for the sheep? Is that guarding and looking after the sheep?"

3. So it was also an intolerable preaching to them when He said that He has still other sheep which were not of this sheepfold (that is, they did not belong to the people who alone are called God's people), whom He would also bring to Himself. Those who were not of this sheepfold would become one flock under one Shepherd, no matter where they remained with their sheepfold and their sheep farm.

They understood very well what He meant by "Shepherd" and "sheep" (which was customary language for them, well-known especially from Scripture), namely, that He claimed to be a man who wanted to teach and rule the people, etc. However, because He is so absurd, as they thought, that



He wants to be the only Shepherd, and yet says that He will lay down His life for the sheep and that He has still other sheep whom He wants to bring and make one flock—even though they, the Jews, do not want to be His sheep—they are offended at Him and say, “He is insane and the devil is speaking from Him” [John 10:20].

Nevertheless, they did perceive this much: His intent was that their sheep farm—that is, their whole government which they had from Moses: the Law, the priesthood, circumcision, worship arranged for them by God Himself—would cease and no longer have any authority. He wants to make a new [government], in which He alone would rule, and would set up a new flock of both Jews and Gentiles (as He finds them) who would all cling to Him. He would pay no attention to the other, and Judaism with its government, glory, and existence can remain, stand, or fall, if it can.

4. He makes it still worse by saying, “I am the Good Shepherd” [John 10:11], by which He draws the people to Himself. He means to say, “Abandon whatever you have for teachers and rulers, and take Me for your Shepherd.” He calls the best of all among them, those who teach and work with Moses and the Law, “hirelings,” who are to be abandoned and not heard. And then there is the other group: “thieves and murderers” [John 10:1], that is, those who teach against God’s Word and are public [persecutors. By that He fully] deserves that they should execute Him without any sentence and grace as a publicly cursed slanderer against God, God’s Law, and God’s people.

5. Without doubt, the great lords, high priests, Pharisees, scribes, and all who belonged to their spiritual government defiantly boasted and bragged: “We sit in the true office and priestly estate, instituted not by Moses but by God Himself (through Moses). How dare You, You rebellious scoundrel, open Your mouth before all the people and boast against God’s institution and commandment that You want to be the Shepherd (and You alone)? You are not of the priestly tribe, to whom God committed what they were to do through Moses and commanded the people to listen to them. When did God speak publicly before all the people with You as He did with Moses? Who are You, then, or where do You come from, that You dare on Your own authority to let this be heard and to apply to Yourself alone everything that is said and commanded about the shepherd’s office? By so doing, You are exalting only Yourself above and against Moses, God’s Law, the priesthood, and the whole government! Does that not mean rebelliously intruding on the whole people’s government and crown, and in addition slandering and sinning against the divine Majesty?”

6. What does it mean when He says, “I am the Good Shepherd,” other than: “People should listen to Me alone. The whole flock of sheep—that is, all the people—belongs to Me alone. I alone am the Shepherd for them, the only



Good Shepherd who helps the sheep. You, on the other hand, are nothing but hirelings who do not care about the sheep, but seek only your own [advantage] in them and let them perish in their need." That means, in a word, making all the people disloyal to them and saying that they have no Good Shepherd or preacher who is faithful to them or can help them; they should not listen to them. ("My sheep," He says, "do not listen to a stranger's voice" [John 10:5]). But if they cling to Him, they will be helped.

7. Moreover (He says), He is not only the Shepherd of these sheep, but He also has still another group and people (who are not under Moses' government and are completely outside of this sheepfold) who also cling to Him and are all of equal value to Him—Gentiles like Jews, Jews like Gentiles. Now this is the most offensive thing of all: that He so humiliates God's people; and along with their Law, priesthood, and everything else makes them equal to the Gentiles; and, again, makes the Gentiles equal to them so that neither is better or has more than the other. In short, this is as much as saying that everything Moses instituted and ordered with the priesthood, temple, and worship should be finished and done with. Here begins a new priesthood and government, a new Shepherd, to whom alone the flock belongs and who alone does everything. This surely is knocking the bottom out of the barrel, cutting the head off of all Judaism, depriving it of all its glory, and telling them simply to cease being shepherds, to listen to Him alone, and to let Him be everything.

8. That had to be an offensive, slanderous preaching to them. In their minds they thought nothing was more certain than: "God through Moses put us into the priesthood, the teaching and ruling office of the whole nation. Whatever God has commanded and arranged must stand and not be changed by any creature. Therefore, our priesthood and Moses' government must remain eternally." If the Gentiles are to be brought and become God's people, that must not and cannot happen through this carpenter's apprentice from Nazareth (as they regarded and called Jesus [Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3]), but through Moses, in that they are circumcised, accept his Law, visit the temple at Jerusalem, etc. At that time even the apostles themselves still thought that this must remain above all things as God's arrangement and command, given and instituted from heaven. In opposition to it, this Jesus of Nazareth dares to step forward and publicly say the opposite: "If you want to come to God and be saved, then you must finally abandon Moses, the Law, the temple, and the priesthood. None of these will in any way help you. All must cling to Me, whether they are Jew, Gentile, priest, layman, or whoever, even if it were Moses himself."



So the Jews stumbled over this preaching, and still stumble over it to this day. This offense against Moses and their Law is so much in their way that they cannot get over it.

9. It is no less offensive to our opponents, the pope and his crowd, to preach in this way against their government (as must be preached from this Gospel reading). Their government has been called the only government of the Christian Church in the world; in it was the regular power and everything that belongs to the Church, namely, Baptism, the Sacrament, the Keys, etc. These things were inherited from the apostles and have endured for a long time. For the sake of these they, just like the Jews, want alone to be God's people and the Church.

It is so very intolerable to them when, despite all that they assert, we on the contrary want to say that they are not the Church and that God cares nothing about their boasting, government, and all that, and when we separate from them, are disobedient, and teach this to others. We do this because, under the name of the Church of Christ and of faith, they have quite obscured this Shepherd, Christ, and (under the name of the church and Christian government) they have filled the church with their own worthless inventions. Yet they are not as good as hirelings, but are wolves and murderers, as they themselves prove by their public persecuting and murdering of Christians on account of this doctrine and confession about Christ. He is the only Shepherd. Through Him alone we have the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. He alone has also laid down His life for us.

10. I say that if the pope had it as good as the Jews did, who undeniably had Scripture and God's Word for them, then no one could have gotten along with them. The Jews had this great advantage for themselves: that their affairs were instituted at God's command through Moses, and then confirmed by miracles; it was so strictly arranged that whoever refused to listen to Moses had to be stoned at God's command and uprooted from His people [cf. Lev. 24:10-23; Num. 15:32-36; Deut. 13:6-11]. Our [opponents], God be praised, at least do not have the boast and testimony that their church government was commanded and confirmed by God. Now they act just like the Jews: no matter what is preached about Christ and the Gospel, they cry out against it that we must obey the church, listen to the fathers, keep the canons and decrees of the councils, etc. "How else," they say, "will anyone know what and where the Christians or the church are? There must be a set method and an established order, as that was beautifully arranged through the fathers and councils and as has happened for so long a time, that the church has a common head, the pope, and a regular government of bishops, and under these, the common priesthood, etc.; and over all of this there is a general council, whose judgment, conclusion, and verdict is to be followed



in all matters, etc. Whoever does not keep this beautiful arrangement and set method, or speaks against it and causes it to be divided, must be from the devil, an apostate, rebellious, cursed heretic."

11. We must open our mouths against this and say to everyone, along the lines of this sermon of Christ (since He has commanded to preach it to all creatures [Mark 16:15]): "Dear friend, you may certainly keep, brag highly, and elevate these human things, but you do not become a Christian with them, for that is not yet the true Shepherd and Master, who is called Christ. You must be led elsewhere so that you correctly know and listen to Him, or all of this will not at all help you to salvation." The Christian estate is something different from the pope's government, and also something different and higher than the fathers taught or the councils decreed. Although they did a good job, just as Moses also did a good (and even somewhat better) job, so that the Jews were circumcised, they sacrificed and observed their worship, or so that among us there is a beautiful arrangement of offices and estates, external discipline, and beautiful worship with fasting, praying, singing, etc.—all this is not yet what Christ says, "I am the true Shepherd" [cf. John 10:11].

12. We must carefully distinguish this Shepherd and His office from all other preachers, teachers, and whatever there may be which govern souls. (That is why He preaches this.) Let all of them do as good a job as they can, still none of them is a Good Shepherd. Moses certainly did not do a bad job; he set up a beautiful ordinance for spiritual and bodily government, both in external discipline and in worship. Nevertheless, his Jews had to hear that it does not in any way help them before God. Now, after it has lasted and endured so long, another will come who will strikingly brag and boast: "You do not yet have the true Shepherd you ought to have. I alone am the one whose voice you must listen to (provided that you want to be saved). I have still other sheep, that is, people who neither know nor observe anything at all about Moses and your whole government, and nevertheless they are all to be one flock. How will that happen? In this way: both of them will learn to know Me as their true Shepherd and to listen to My voice. Therefore, I let preach whoever preaches and leave it alone; but no one will find the Shepherd who can help the sheep unless he comes here and stays with Me."

13. Therefore, we should also conclude from this that there is nothing of value in what those shouters are asserting who still want to maintain the papacy with its episcopal masks and who blabber much about the church government which they want, where they sit together in the regularly inherited power as the heirs of the chairs of the first bishops, who were ordained by the apostles, etc. They say that the entire government of the church is to be bound to this, so that without it there can be no church. They alone have the



power to ordain (or consecrate) and confirm bishops. They persuade us that we should listen only to whatever they decide together and must receive from them everything that belongs to the office and government of the church, namely, the Sacraments, the preaching office, the consecration of priests, etc. They say that whoever has not been smeared and anointed by them are not true bishops or priests and cannot administer the Sacraments. For that reason they also rant and spit at us, saying that we have disobeyed and rebelliously set ourselves against the regular power of the church and have separated from them, etc.

14. In opposition to this, Christ teaches us in this Gospel reading to look to Him alone as the true Shepherd, who is the only Founder, Lord, and Head of the Church, and thus says that His sheep listen to His voice and no other. By doing this, He shows that [His sheep] are the true Church, even if they are not under the pope and his bishops (not even under Moses). Along with His kingdom and Church He is bound neither to Moses nor to Judaism, even though they were ordered by God, much less to the pope's and bishops' government, which they themselves set up. He has not taken or received anything from them, but is the Lord over Moses and all creatures; all people should be obediently subject to Him.

15. Therefore, even though the Jews in the name of Moses, or our [opponents] under the name of the church and its power, venture to lead people away from Christ—that is, from His Word and the pure teaching of the Gospel—He says, “My sheep listen to My voice, but they do not listen to the voice of strangers and do not follow them” [John 10:3, 5]. Thus He gives us not only the power and right but also the earnest order and command not to listen or stay with such [strangers].

16. Now we see and comprehend that the whole papal crowd not only themselves keep, believe, and teach nothing about Christ but also are obvious persecutors of the Gospel, that is, wolves and murderers of Christ's sheep and His Church, and that they conduct and use a truly anti-Christian government. Therefore, we should and must, at Christ's command, thoroughly break away from their imaginary power and whatever they have, as from people already dismissed by Christ Himself. We are commanded to have nothing to do with them, but to avoid and flee from them as from the devil's church, as also St. Paul pronounces that verdict: “If anyone teaches a different gospel, even if it were an angel from heaven, let him be cursed” (Galatians 1 [8]). That certainly means that all power in the church has been dismissed quite strongly, and we have been commanded to regard it as dismissed and condemned by God.

17. The chief point and summary of this Gospel reading is that Christ is called and alone is the Good Shepherd. It holds out to us the power and fruit



of the preaching of the Gospel and its office and distinguishes this from the office of Moses and the preaching of the Law. He states only the two (who guard and feed the sheep), the true Shepherd and the hireling. The wolf is nothing but a murderer, who only harms and ruins everything. To restrain it we must have shepherds. However, if we compare both the Shepherd and the hireling, then we find that Christ alone is the Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep [John 10:11]. Neither Moses nor anyone who preaches the Law does that.

18. This is why He justly calls Himself alone the Good Shepherd, that is, the comforting and beneficial Shepherd. Although Moses, the prophets, and all other preachers who deal with the Law certainly preach and teach, they still cannot lay down their lives for the sheep and deliver them. They all must die for themselves and cannot deliver either themselves or others. However, "I alone am the one," He says, "who lays down His life for the sheep. Only My dying avails and delivers the sheep. Because this is what I am, I institute both this new preaching and a new flock and people."

19. In this way He draws the true Shepherd's office—that is, the authority to deliver consciences and souls—to His own person alone, as the one who alone has done and accomplished the work of our redemption, put down His body and life for His sheep, and instituted, promotes, and maintains the office through which He brings them to Himself, rules, and maintains them. So the whole preaching of the Gospel is included in this office wherever, whenever, and through whomever it is preached. They, too, are called "shepherds" after Christ, not with regard to their person (no one can be that except Christ Himself), but because they are in the office which belongs to Christ alone, and through them He is active and working in it.

20. That is the first point, about His person and office that He conducts in His Christendom. Afterward He Himself explains it further when He speaks about His sheep. But first He establishes the contrast with the hireling, saying:

*"But the hireling who is not the shepherd, to whom the sheep do not belong, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches and scatters the sheep. But the hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care for the sheep." [John 10:12–13]*

21. He names three kinds of persons or a threefold office which has to do with the sheep: the true Shepherd, which is He alone, as has been said; the hireling, that is, all besides Him who preach and teach from the Law how we ought to live and act but who do not point to Christ, such as the scribes and Pharisees among the Jewish people of that time; and, finally, the wolf, who also wants to be among the sheep and rule but only harms and ruins. That is



the devil himself; he also has his messengers and preachers who do not have God's Word (neither the Ten Commandments nor the Gospel) but mislead souls with false doctrine and heresy (which Paul also calls "the doctrines of the devil, of those who speak lies in hypocrisy," 1 Timothy 3 [4:1-2]). At the present time there are the pope's anti-Christian doctrines, the Turks' Koran, and other sects. These three teachers have always been in the world from the beginning. We should cling to the first alone, correct the second, and flee completely from the third. But no one does this except the true sheep, that is, the little flock which knows Christ.

22. Now He also shows what the situation is with the sheep and why He alone must be recognized and believed as the true Shepherd. The situation with the sheep is that they are in certain danger and peril (if they are apart from the Shepherd) of being snatched, torn to pieces, and murdered by the wolf, since by their own strength they can neither guard nor defend themselves against him. By nature the sheep is more weak and defenseless than all other animals and must live by the protection, defense, and help of another. The true shepherd must take an interest in them; be with them everywhere; watch over, deliver, and defend them whenever it is necessary, so that they do not perish. He does not do it (says Christ) with a paid hireling who is not their own, to whom the sheep do not belong, for even though he will lead and feed them for a while, he will not remain to the end. When the wolf comes, he takes to flight so that he himself can escape, and meanwhile he leaves the poor sheep stuck in peril and perishing.

23. So it also happens in this spiritual government of the conscience that, if Christ does not Himself guard, guide, and lead through His office as Shepherd, then no other preaching is helpful or beneficial, even if it is otherwise good and correct. It cannot stand the test in peril against the devil when he opens the jaws of hell through fright at sin and eternal death. When this happens, then the poor sheep stands there alone and forsaken, directed to himself and his own efforts through the doctrine of the Law and our works. He no longer has any help or assistance in which he can find comfort and deliverance.

24. We can find no better example of this than our own past (which we ourselves experienced) under the papacy. Then the most precious and pleasing sermon anyone could make (which, along with others, I sought to teach both to myself and to the people) sounded like this: "You must keep the Ten Commandments, love God with your whole heart and your neighbor as yourselves," etc. It was not and is not wrong to teach this, for the teaching of the Law should and must remain. However, in order to impress this upon the people, they added that we can certainly do this, for man has the natural light of reason given by God so that he can understand what he is to do and



not do. Moreover, he has the will, by which he can intend and begin to keep it. And if he diligently practices these things and does what is in his power, then God will look at it and be pleased and undoubtedly give him grace, etc.

25. On top of this comfort, they gave many more good suggestions (since they themselves noticed that what they taught about the Ten Commandments would not yet help). Everything they taught about separate, strict orders and life, mortification of the body, fasting, vigils, pilgrimages, etc., was to serve for escaping death and being saved. They regarded all of that as good and precious, and did it with good intentions, as if God would be pleased with it and regard it as fulfillment of His Commandments. However, when people had attempted all of this, and at the last the devil came when they were on their deathbed or with other difficult afflictions, then all this teaching and activity were of no help at all. The poor consciences were miserably led into the devil's sweat bath, in which they were alarmed and tormented themselves with despairing thoughts, words, and sighs, such as: "Lord God, if I could prolong my life, I would make amends for all my sins!" etc.

26. That was the benefit and fruit of the hirelings' doctrine, which pointed the poor people to their own doing and suffering, since they knew nothing at all about Christ and faith. This preaching can only comfort and sustain until the devil comes. He cares nothing about our works or satisfactions and life. Rather, if he does not find Christ, he has won the game, and continues to tear souls to pieces and devour them as much as he wants without restraint or hindrance. These teachers and masters cannot even help themselves. Together with the sheep, they are chased off and hunted down so that they cannot endure and finally themselves are lost to the enemy, if they do not learn of other help.

A common example of this is told about a hermit who once came to a sick man on his deathbed and wanted to comfort him so that he would die well. He admonished him (as such comforters—work-saints and monks—are accustomed to do) willingly to submit to death and patiently to suffer, since in that way he would obtain forgiveness for all sins from God. He would pledge his soul for that. Dear God! Here lies a poor sheep in peril, at its last gasp; it takes what it can and dies relying on that comfort. But what happens? Soon after the death of this poor man, remorse comes to the old hermit and makes him so anxious and alarmed that he becomes despondent (of just that comfort which he gave others), and no comforting would help him, until he also came into despair.

27. This is what must happen when nothing more than our works are preached or even only the Ten Commandments are proclaimed—even though we must have and proclaim this preaching, especially for the uneducated crowd. But if Christ Himself is not there, this accomplishes nothing



more than that the poor sheep wander and are scattered, and fall into fright and despair, until they finally perish, if they are not brought back by the true Shepherd.

28. When human nature and reason hear the preaching of the Law, even from those who proclaim the Law best, [but] do not know Christ, they fall into folly and imagine, when they have heard this preaching, that they can immediately do it. "They have," they say, "both the understanding and the will to do it." They think no further than that this is accomplished with their self-made thoughts and outward works. Then they go ahead and think that they must do whatever people say or assert about good works, as if these were commanded by God. They want to make amends for sin and to blot it out in that way. Yet God does not demand that we do good works for that reason or that sin can be blotted out with works. Then they go on from that erroneous delusion to gather and heap up all the works they can invent or hear about from others, which God has not commanded.

They are simply caught up in this syllogism: We are to do good works. This is a good work. Therefore, I am obliged to do it. So they go away and are always busy doing this, but never reach the point where they have finished. So they also cannot withstand the wolf. The more they do, the less they are satisfied, and the more they find to do. As soon as the devil comes and asserts: "Look, here is a good work which you have not done!" they cannot get over it and must let him tear them away.

29. Yes, even if they had done all that a man can do, yet they would still see, when the wolf comes before their eyes with his wide-open jaws of hell, that it will not pass the test against God's wrath and judgment. The devil blows all that away with one breath and says: "It is true that you have done much, but when did you finish doing what God commanded? He tells you to love Him with your whole heart above all things, to have no evil thoughts or lusts or desires in your heart, to speak no useless and futile words," etc. Then immediately both the doctrine which the hireling gave you and all your works and activities which you have carried out with such hard labor fall away, and you have no comfort or refuge against the devil. He always has the advantage of working on you through your own conscience and the testimony of your own deeds, to which you were directed by the hireling who only teaches you what to do but does not and cannot give you the ability to do it. So you are stuck in peril, vanquished by yourself, and trapped by the words: "We must do good."

30. In this way he (the devil) through the pope also introduced into the churches all his dirt and filth of human doctrines, which no one could prevent, for they all proceed from the basis: "We must do whatever is good." Therefore, people had to do whatever they called "good" and "worship of



God.” They also do not cease to blabber against us that our doctrine of faith and love is a simplistic doctrine, since we do not know to preach anything more than the childish doctrine of the Ten Commandments. They say that we must go much higher and do much more, and not only teach what is in Scripture but also listen to what the church and the councils say, etc.

31. Therefore, everything any shabby, shameless beggar-monk dared to assert was forcibly confirmed, and it prevailed like a flood. We simpletons who were doctors of Holy Scripture could not restrain the wicked barefoot rabble from persuading the people that if they buried a dead man in their monk’s cowl, he would be saved and the devil could not carry him off (unless he had already gotten him earlier).<sup>1</sup> We were all blinded and taken captive by the words: “We must do good works, and whoever does them will be saved.”

32. To this day we could still not hold our own against the papacy or overthrow their least error if we had no more than this doctrine of our deeds and works. Even the holy martyr, John Hus, was shouted down and condemned by the devil at their hellish Council of Constance because he rebuked the pope and his crowd on account of their wicked, shameless life by which they did not even keep their own canonical laws.<sup>2</sup> They had this defense against it: even though the life was not right, the doctrine was right, that we should do and keep these things. So the papacy was not overthrown as long as its doctrine was regarded as right and remained unharmed.

33. Therefore, these two, the hireling and the wolf, are always together. The devil can easily tolerate such teachers, for (when the true Shepherd is not there) they serve him so that he can rend apart and wreak havoc among the sheep without any trouble, when and as he wants. There is no way to prevent it except Christ with His teaching and protection. He (as the only true Shepherd) does not let the sheep be slain by the wolf (for if that happens, then they are already in his jaws), but Himself stands against him, gathers us to Himself, and protects us so that the devil must yield. That means that we preach from Scripture that no human work or activity (no matter how good it is, even done according to the Ten Commandments), and nothing we can teach, helps at all to free from sin or to stand against God’s wrath and the

1 The monastic orders could grant tertiaries or benefactors the privilege of being buried in the monastic habit, which was thought to confer participation in the good works of the order.

2 John [Jan] Hus (1369–1415), Czech theologian and rector of the University of Prague, criticized clerical immorality and the papal doctrine of the Church and was condemned by the Council of Constance and burned at the stake. Luther scandalized his opponents at the 1519 Leipzig Disputation by defending Hus (LW 31:315, 321). Luther frequently referred to Hus as evidence of the impossibility of suppressing the Gospel: *Commentary on Psalm 94* (1526), LW 14:253; *To the Christians at Halle* (1527), LW 43:146; *Lectures on Isaiah* (1527–30/1532–34), LW 17:44; *Commentary on Psalm 118* (1530), LW 14:88; *Sermon on the Mount* (1530–32/1532), LW 21:165; *Lectures on Genesis* (1535–45/1544–54), LW 8:226.



fright of death and hell, etc. Rather, the only thing that helps is that Christ has laid down His life for you and taken it up again in order to overcome the devil and death and subject them to Himself, so that you are preserved through His strength and power.

34. But where the voice of this Shepherd remains, the sheep can protect themselves from both the hireling and the wolf, saying: "You preach correctly that I should keep the Ten Commandments, but you do not tell me where that leaves me, because I have not fulfilled them. In this situation I will listen to my dear Shepherd who died for me; He did not die without reason or in vain, but just for this: to save me, who was such a poor, lost sheep without a Shepherd, in the power of the wolf." So also when the devil shows his teeth to your heart in order to slay and devour you and says, "You should have done or avoided this or that; you have not done or avoided it; therefore, you must be mine," then, as a lamb who knows its Shepherd, you can take refuge in Christ. You can tell the devil to stand against the one who died for you and rose again and see what victory he can have against Him.

35. You can even more beat back the others who are not as good as hirelings but are the slaves and servants of the wolf (who come with their goose sermon<sup>3</sup> about our own invented works). You can say to them: "I will not know or hear anything about that, for I have something much different and greater to do: learning the Ten Commandments. And yet I cannot keep them. Why, then, should I afflict myself with such useless works, which only harm and hinder me from looking at the Ten Commandments correctly?" It has happened that the world was so full of human doctrines and commands that no bishop, not even a doctor, correctly understood or taught the Ten Commandments.

36. We have not rebuked and attacked the papacy because they live wickedly and shamefully (which they themselves also must confess). Rather, we say to them that, even if they led holy, angelic lives (which they have never done and never will do) and kept not only their own law but also Moses' Law (both of which are impossible), we would still regard them not as hirelings but as wolves themselves because they teach nothing except what kills souls. That which is not the doctrine of Christ cannot feed or give life to the souls. Also, even though the hireling does not himself slaughter and kill, still he does not restrain the wolf. Therefore, because you do not point out or teach this Shepherd, but do the opposite, we should not and will not listen to you, but rather flee from you as from the wolf.

37. With this argument we overthrow the entire papacy and everything that leads us away from this doctrine. Otherwise (as was said) it is impossible

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3 *Gens Predigt*. That is, a sermon delivered to simple people, perhaps for the purpose of misleading them.



to rebuke even the least error which is advanced under the form of a holy life. There is no doctrine so foolish or shameful that does not find hearers and students, as we have had to experience in so many heresies and schisms in the church. We read that the heathen (who were at least sensible and highly intelligent people) nevertheless worshiped not only cats and storks but also cabbages and onions, and even the male member. All of this has the name and delusion of being a good work and of serving God, and the one who preaches this has the reputation and pretense of being a shepherd who wants to counsel souls and show them how to come to God, etc.

38. We have so far been unable to rebuke or prevent the shameful lies and fables of the monks concerning the rosary of Mary (this was fifty *Ave Marias* and five Our Fathers, which were spoken to Mary the virgin). The popes gave many indulgences to it, and the preacher monks<sup>4</sup> smeared large books full of invented and stinking lies about the powerful miracles done by this prayer, which they had first invented. There were innumerable lying inventions of this sort devised by others, such as the barefooted monks<sup>5</sup> with Mary's crown and psalter,<sup>6</sup> etc., about which they themselves must now be silent and ashamed. Yes, at the present day nobody in the papacy could refute or resist the Turkish or Jewish religion, for they have neither the true Master nor the true, fundamental doctrine of this Shepherd. Therefore, the devil has power and authority over them, even through the Ten Commandments, for he always has the advantage of convincing you by your own conscience that you have not kept them—even more if you have spent your entire life only with the works of human doctrine.

39. However, if you know this Shepherd, you can defend yourself against the devil and death, saying: "Sadly, I have not kept God's Commandments, but I crawl under the wings of this dear hen (my dear Lord Christ [Matt. 23:37; Luke 13:34]) and believe that He is my dear Shepherd, Bishop, and Mediator before God, who covers and defends me with His innocence and gives me His righteousness. Whatever I have not kept, He has kept; what is more, whatever I have sinned, He has paid for with His blood," etc. He died and rose again not for Himself but for me, since He says here that He gives His life not for Himself but for His sheep [John 10:11], that is, as St. Peter says, "The righteous died for the unrighteous" [1 Pet. 3:18], etc. So, then, you are secure, and the devil along with his hell must leave you alone, for he certainly

<sup>4</sup> *Prediger Mönche*, that is, the Dominicans.

<sup>5</sup> *Barfusser*, that is, the Franciscans.

<sup>6</sup> "Mary's crown and psalter" were forms of prayer centered on the repetition of the Lord's Prayer and especially of the *Ave Maria*, a prayer that had arrived at its expanded form (with the petition for Mary's intercession) only at the beginning of the sixteenth century and was not officially approved until 156.



cannot get anything from Christ, who has already overcome him. He defends and keeps you, if you believe in Him as His lamb. (As a faithful Shepherd, He does not leave you but stands by you.)

40. If you are now secure under this Shepherd against the wolf, the hireling correctly comes and becomes a good teacher of how you should live according to God's Commandments and do good works. He leads you where you yourself can now go (since it is apart from the struggle of the conscience against sin and death) in such a way that you are first in the protection and pasture of this Shepherd and do not depart from Him.

41. These three kinds of preaching are always current in the world. The first [is the preaching] of the great crowd, who do not advance God's Word but human doctrine. These are wolves, such as the pope with his decrees, the Turk with his Koran, the Jews with their Talmud, and other sects against the correct, pure doctrine of Scripture. The second [is the preaching] of the hirelings, who preach only the Ten Commandments. There are few of these, since without the Gospel they do not remain pure for long. The third are those who purely and rightly point and lead to Christ. Although these are the fewest of all, they must still be found somewhere until the Last Day, as we say in the creed: "I believe in the holy Christian Church," etc.<sup>7</sup>

42. These are the true shepherds, because they preach not themselves but Christ and so are the Lord Christ's mouth, as He Himself says, "You are not the ones speaking, but your Father's Spirit speaks through you" (Matthew 10 [:20]). Again: "I will give you a mouth and wisdom" (that is, "It will not be your mouth, but I will so prepare your mouth that it will be a mouth full of wisdom given by Me and speaking about Me") "which all your adversaries will not contradict or withstand" (Luke 21 [:15]).

This is the thunderbolt by which everything that is not of this doctrine and stamp is put down, because it gives no benefit or help for the life to come, even though it may otherwise be good for keeping discipline among people or for bringing them to a knowledge of their weaknesses. What is everything that a man, a pope, or a Turk can do against eternal death and hell?

43. This storms and overthrows the pope's government and all human doctrines. We do not challenge them for failing to keep their own commandments and doctrine, for they always have a defense against this, that even though their life is culpable, yet their doctrine is right and good. They forcibly retain their government from Christ's words: "The Pharisees sit on Moses' seat. All they tell you to keep, you should keep and do, but do not do according to their works, for they say, and do not do" (Matthew 23 [:2-3]), etc. That is why, before we had the Gospel, we could do nothing against

<sup>7</sup> I.e., in the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed (Kolb-Wengert, p. 22; *Concordia*, p. 16).



them. Now that we know Christ, we can condemn their doctrine along with all their deeds.

44. So now you have the distinction that Christ shows between His preaching and government and that of all others, who want to govern consciences and hearts without or apart from Him. With these many words about the hireling He depicts the danger, even the harm and destruction, which must follow if He is not heard and recognized as the only Shepherd, since the wolf will not be kept away no matter how many hirelings we have. With their doctrine none of them can give counsel or help about how we are to be freed from sin and death or oppose the devil. In short, the poor sheep must be eternally lost and perish, if they do not come to this Shepherd. That is why He repeats again what He said at the beginning, in order to impress on us that we must cling only to His protection and pasture (that is, to His Word and preaching office). He says:

*"I am the Good Shepherd. I know My own and am known by My own, just as My Father knows Me and I know the Father. I lay down My life for the sheep." [John 10:14-15]*

45. "There are many of you—unfortunately, all too many—who are called shepherds and undertake the governance of feeding and leading souls, but I alone am the one," He says again, "who is called and is the Good Shepherd." That means in plain words: "Apart from Me they all are not good, but pitiless, cruel shepherds, because they leave the poor sheep in the jaws of the wolf! You should learn to know Me as your dear, faithful, good, kind, sweet, and comforting Shepherd. Your heart should laugh and be certain that through Him you are redeemed from every burden, fear, trouble, and danger and that He will not and cannot let you perish. I am proving this," He says, "by laying down My life for the sheep. Therefore, cheerfully cling to Me, and let no one else rule in your consciences. Rather, listen to Me speak comforting words and demonstrate by deeds that I do not want to force, afflict, or burden you as Moses and others, but want to lead and guide, defend and help you in the dearest way."

46. So He always emphasizes this one doctrine as the chief point of our salvation, that apart from this Shepherd, Christ, apprehended through this faith—that He alone rescues us through His death from the power of death and the devil—there is no deliverance or help. This is the most necessary doctrine that must be proclaimed in Christendom. The devil is hostile to it and cannot tolerate it when we remain with this Good Shepherd and in a pure understanding and mind. Therefore, he is always raging against it through his "scales," both with cunning and villainy, persecution and slander, in order to tear the people away from it, just as he also did through the Jews



against this preaching. On the other hand, as His good sheep we should hold to the Shepherd's voice and know that, when all things fail and the aid and help of all men is nothing, we are secure and are preserved through faith in this Shepherd who laid down His life for us.

Therefore, He makes a conclusion about His sheep—that is, about all of Christendom—about how He knows them and they, in turn, know Him: "I know My own and am known by My own" [John 10:14].

47. This is certainly strange language, and by all means peculiar and ridiculous to the Jews, as much as when He said that He alone is the Shepherd. Without a doubt they scornfully shook their heads at Him and said: "You talk much about Your Shepherd's office and Your sheep. Friend, where do You have Your sheep, and where are they to be found? We have a nation and a flock who cling to the temple and the worship instituted by God, who cling to the Law of Moses. Thus they are contained in a sheepfold, so that we can know and name them. But where are Yours? How are they known? What are their features? Give them a name and sign." "No," He says, "you will not and should not know them as you presume. Your sheep have their sign by which they are known and distinguished, in that they are circumcised, come to the temple at Jerusalem, etc. My sheep have a different mark, but not painted or marked with red ochre and dyes so that it can be seen on the forehead or on the clothes." The pope, following the Jews, also makes and paints such a church and Christians who act and live externally so that everyone can recognize them.

"No," He means to say, "what does it is not that you portray them with the mark and seal which you draw on them or which Moses paints on them. Rather, they are so painted and drawn that no one knows them except I alone."

48. Although Christians also have external signs given by Christ—namely, Baptism, the Sacrament, and the preaching of the Gospel—these can certainly fail (if we are to judge each person in particular). Many have Baptism, hear the Gospel, and go with others to the Sacrament and nevertheless are evil and not Christians. [Christ's sheep] are to be recognized only where they have in their hearts the faith that regards Christ as its Shepherd. But who knows this? You will not see that in me, nor I in you, for no one can look into another's heart. Therefore, it is still true that no one knows these sheep and this flock, or can describe them, except this Shepherd, Christ alone. "So, in turn, only My sheep know Me," He says, "so that they do not let themselves be sent away or torn from Me, but remain with this faith, confession, and preaching: that I am the Shepherd and lay down My life for them against the devil, the world, death, and hell."



49. By doing this, He once again drives out Judaism with its Law and priesthood and, even more, our papacy with all its conduct and takes from all of them the power to rule and judge His flock. He simply will not let them be His and His Church's master. He rejects and condemns all the judgments they want to pass, according to their Moses or another external ordinance and government, on who are Christians or not Christians, and God's people. On the contrary, He tells them that they shall not and cannot know His sheep. Nevertheless, He will have and preserve His Church, even though they do not know or accept either the Shepherd or the sheep, but reject and condemn them as separated from God's people.

50. He then tells us how we are to distinguish the true Church and God's people from that which has the name and reputation but in truth is not the Church. He teaches us that the Church is not and should not be a group which must be formed by external government and ordinance, like the Jewish people by Moses' Law. It does not continue and rule by external human power, nor is it preserved thereby; it is not at all bound to a regular succession or a government of bishops or their successors, as the papacy asserts.

Rather, it is a spiritual assembly which listens to this Shepherd, believes in Him, and is ruled by Him through the Holy Spirit. It is recognized externally only by having His Word, that is, the preaching of the Gospel and His Sacraments. But it is known inwardly only by Him, as in turn it also knows Him through faith and clings to Him when it hears His Word—regardless of whether it observes or even knows anything about that external, Jewish or papistic government and ordinance, or whether it is scattered here and there in the world without any organized, external government. That is the way it was at the time of Christ and the apostles, when they believed in Christ and confessed Him apart from and in opposition to the regular power of the whole priesthood.

51. Therefore, if you really want to know and find and give the definition of what a Christian is or why a man is called a Christian, then you must not gape or look to Moses' Law, the pope's government, or the life and holiness of all people (even the saintliest of them). Rather, you must look only at these words of Christ, where He says: "My sheep know Me" and "My sheep hear My voice" [John 10:27]. Then you can say that a Christian is not someone who lives as a very strict and serious Carthusian or as a hermit, for even Jews and Turks can do that (some of whom live even more strictly). In short, nothing that is in us or can be done by us makes us Christian. What does? Only that we know this man, entrust ourselves to Him, and regard Him as He wants to be regarded, namely, as the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep and knows them.



52. This knowledge is nothing else than faith, which follows from the preaching office of the Word. The preaching office is derived not from our own thoughts or from people but was brought and revealed through Christ Himself from heaven, as He says to Peter: "Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you" (Matthew 16 [:17]), etc. These two, His Word and our faith, must always agree and be together, for if He did not reveal Himself through the Word or let His voice be heard, then we would know nothing about the Shepherd. In this way and in no other do we become Christians: by hearing this voice alone and knowing no other shepherd nor imagining any other, no matter what it is called or how it glitters, but grasp this image alone in our hearts. So they are all at the same time the sheep of Christ without any distinction. Some have color and form by which they are recognized, but are similar to each other by believing together in this Shepherd and confessing His Word, even though otherwise they differ externally in many ways, and are even scattered here and there throughout the world without order, and cast among other people.

53. From this we have the comfort that whoever knows Christ in this way is surely one of His sheep, already known by Him and chosen as a sheep. He ought not and need not seek or gape further about how he may become a sheep, nor alarm and torment himself with vain thoughts about whether he is predestined or how he can be certain of salvation. Rather, he should cheerfully take comfort and be sure that when he hears Christ's voice, he has Him as the dear Shepherd who knows him, that is, who receives him as His lamb, cares for him, and will protect and deliver him, so that he need have no fear of the devil, hell, and death. He then later further explains this knowledge of His sheep and its power with comforting words, saying, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me, and I give them eternal life, and no one will snatch them out of My hand" [John 10:27-28], etc.

54. For greater comfort He adds: "just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father" [John 10:15]. It is a glorious, comforting knowledge through which the Father knows His dear Son with inexpressible, unfathomable, eternal love, as He also publicly testified by the voice from heaven and said, "This is My beloved Son" [Matt. 3:17; 17:5]. For His sake He has shown mercy to the human race and received them into grace, since they had fallen into eternal wrath and damnation and would have been eternally lost, as St. Paul says, "He has been gracious to us in the Beloved" (Ephesians 1 [:6]), etc. So Christ also knows us with a similar inexpressible love, since from the beginning He loved the human race and, therefore, most deeply humbled Himself beneath all men, and even beneath sin and death, and bore God's wrath for us, since He could not tolerate that the devil should keep us in bonds and eternal damnation [cf. Phil. 2:5-8].



55. Because the Father now knows Christ in this way, and Christ knows us, His sheep, in that way, too, there is one kind of knowledge which reaches from the Father through Christ even to us, through which we in turn are to know the Father's heart toward us through Christ. In other words, just as He loves Christ, His Son, so for His sake He bears toward us (who as lambs know Christ, our Shepherd) true fatherly love, so we would know that, because He has given us His Son, He does not want us to be lost or condemned, if only we believe in Him. He cannot hate His Son, but has sent Him from heaven so that He would save us from sin through His blood and death.

56. This is a strikingly high comfort but also a very spiritual comfort, that is, a knowledge secret and hidden from our eyes and minds—believing that both Christ and the Father know us in this way. This has been totally concealed from all human eyes by all kinds of offenses, weakness, and the offensive attitude of the world and of our flesh and blood. It is not only before the world that they take offense at this kingdom of Christ and His Church, because it is not governed, formed, or ordered according to their wisdom as they think it should be, if it were God's government and work. Because it is even completely against their reason, understanding, and thoughts, they both regard the doctrine to be pure folly and deception, and they condemn and persecute all who cling to it and will not follow their judgment.

But it is still more difficult when Christ hides Himself from His Church and acts as if He has forgotten it—or even completely forsaken and condemned it. He leaves it lying oppressed under the cross, subjected to all the cruelty of the world, while its enemies boast, brag, and gloat against it (as we will hear in the next Gospel reading).<sup>8</sup> Moreover, they must tolerate having the devil severely torment them in particular, being frightened within their hearts at their sin and God's wrath, and thus enduring every misfortune and all of hell. Moreover, they must otherwise sense and see weaknesses and defects in both faith and life in themselves and among their people, and whatever other offense the devil can cause.

57. Who is there, now, who knows the sheep or regards them as sheep? They are so deeply buried and overwhelmed with suffering, shame, disgrace, death, scandal, etc., that they are even hidden from themselves. Obviously, no one except Christ alone comforts them and tells them that, irrespective of all this that scandalizes the world and our own flesh and blood, He nevertheless knows His lambs and does not forget or forsake them, as it appears.

58. In order to impress this all the more strongly on us, He adds the comparison and says, "As My Father knows Me" [John 10:15]. It is obviously a high, hidden knowledge with which God the Father knows His dear, only-begotten Son, since He must lie in the manger like the child of the most

8 See sermon for Third Sunday after Easter on John 16:16–23.



miserable beggar, not only unknown by all His people but also cast off and rejected—yes, since He hangs in the air most shamefully and disgracefully, naked and uncovered, between two murderers, as the worst blasphemer and rebel, cursed by God and all the world, so that He Himself must shout out to Him the great, anguished cry: “My God, My God, how have You forsaken Me?” [Matt. 27:46]. Nevertheless, He says here: “My Father knows Me” (even in this suffering, disgrace, and offensive form) as His only Son, sent by Him, “so that I would be the sacrifice and lay down My soul for the salvation and redemption of My sheep. So I know Him in return, and I know that He has not forgotten nor forsaken Me but will lead Me through and out of the shame, cross, and death to eternal honor, life, and glory.

“So My lambs should and will learn to know Me in their misery, disgrace, suffering, and death as their dear, faithful Savior, who has suffered similarly and even laid down My life for them. They will expect of Me, in certainty, that in their troubles they are not forsaken or forgotten by Me (as reason and the world imagine), but that in all this I will wonderfully preserve them and bring them through it to eternal victory and glory.”

59. The true knowledge of Christ is that He knows us and we are known to Him. This is a very high wisdom, too far and too deeply covered and hidden from the reason and thinking of the world. It is apprehended only in faith, which must here struggle and strive to preserve this knowledge and increase in it, so that it is not led away from Christ by the great scandal that appears, as He Himself says about this: “Blessed is the one who is not offended at Me” (Matthew 11 [:6]).

60. From this we should also learn (as I have often said) not to judge the kingdom of Christ and His Church by the outward appearance and the judgment of reason and human wisdom. Here you are told that this knowledge of the sheep belongs to Christ alone and that it is as much hidden to reason under the greatest offense as He Himself was when hanging on the cross.

61. For that reason the boldness of the mad, arrogant saints and foolish sophists is to be rebuked; with their impudent opinions they are quick to fault and condemn the Christians who still have the doctrine of the Gospel and faith in purity, if they see any weakness or defect in them somewhere. In their heads they picture a church which must have only perfect, heavenly saints, without any blemish, flaw, or offense—which cannot be in this life.

Even apart from the fact that the devil is always sowing his seed among the true flock with the help of his sects and false saints, there are also many among the Christians who are still weak in faith and have many defects in their lives. Yes, even the greatest saints, who are pure in faith and blameless in life, find and sense in themselves many a weakness and residual, sinful inclinations, at which they themselves lament and have plenty of struggling



in order to overcome this offense in themselves. Christ (as the only one who knows His sheep) wants us not to condemn these people, as St. Paul also admonishes: "Who are you to pass judgment on another's servant?" (Romans 14 [:4]), etc.

62. Those who are in the office of the Church—that is, preachers and pastors—especially should learn here how they should act toward the weak and infirm. They are to learn to know them as Christ knows us, that is, not to be bitter and harsh toward them with carrying on and blustering or condemning if everything is not always rigorously correct, but gentle and cautious as they deal with them and bear with their weaknesses until they become stronger. Therefore, the prophet Ezekiel also harshly rebukes the priests and those to whom God committed the office of shepherd because they domineered strictly and harshly over the sheep and did not tend to the weak, did not heal the sick, did not bind up the wounded, did not bring back the straying, and did not seek the lost [Ezek. 34:4]. He says: "I Myself will feed My sheep. I will again seek the lost, bring back the straying, bind up the wounded, and tend to the weak" (Ezekiel 34 [:15–16]), etc.

This shows that among His little flock God also has those who are weak, wounded, straying, and even lost, whom He nevertheless recognizes as His sheep; He does not want them to be rejected, but rather tended, bound up, healed, and brought back. Because they did not do this, but only wanted to rule harshly and strictly according to Moses' government and by the compulsion of the Law, He makes this promise about the kingdom of Christ, in which through the Gospel He will Himself rule and feed His sheep through the true Shepherd, Christ.

*"I have still other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them, and they will hear My voice. There will be one flock and one Shepherd."*  
[John 10:16]

63. We spoke about these words above, at the beginning. With them Christ dismisses the Jews who cling to Moses, along with their synagogue, nation, and priesthood. He tells them that, even though they do not accept Him and cling to Him as their Shepherd (which He was made by God and by the testimony of Moses), He would still find sheep both among them and among others (because they were unwilling) who are not yet called God's people and do not know about Moses—that is, the Gentiles. He proclaimed earlier through the prophets: "I will call them My people who are not My people" (Hosea 2 [:23; Rom. 9:25]), etc. And: "I will make you angry with those who are not a nation" [Deut. 32:21; Rom. 10:19].

"These," He says, "I will bring," not so that they have to hear Moses and you, but so that they hear My voice and so through My Word become My



sheep, even if they do not come here nor receive circumcision and Moses' government nor even have Me bodily and visibly with them. So they all will become one flock in one Word, faith, and Spirit, under Christ, the only Shepherd, and subject to no one else. This began with His ascension and is being fulfilled daily until the Last Day.