

MAY THE GOOD SHEPHERD GIVE YOU GOOD SHEPHERDS

April 18/21, 2024

Acts 20:28-32. “Always keep watch over yourselves and over the whole flock in which the Holy Spirit has placed you as overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves, who will not spare the flock, will come in among you. Even from your own group men will rise up, twisting the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. Therefore, be always on the alert! Remember that for three years, night and day, I never stopped warning each one of you with tears. “And now I entrust you to God and to the word of his grace, which has power to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”

Dear Christian Friends:

You are stopped on the shoulder of the Interstate. You are changing your flat tire. It's raining. It's cold. Then along comes the deputy sheriff. He asks if you need help. You say, “No. I don't want your help. You are just the DEPUTY. Call *the sheriff*. He can help me, but not you.” That's ridiculous. Your pride is robbing you of valuable help just because he was the deputy and not the sheriff.

You are speeding along the Interstate. You see the lights flashing. You hear the siren blaring. You pull over. The squad car pulls up behind you. The officer gets out. He walks to your car. You roll down the window. You notice that it's a DEPUTY sheriff. You tell him, “Deputy, go ahead and write that ticket. But I won't pay it. I will only pay if *the sheriff* writes the ticket.” Good luck with that.

When a deputy sheriff does his or her job, that deputy is working on behalf of the sheriff. As far as you are concerned, when the deputy helps you or tickets you, it's just the same as if the sheriff has helped you or ticketed you.

It works the same in the Church. In John, twenty, Jesus says to his disciples, **Just as the Father has sent me, I am also sending you. Receive the Holy Spirit. Whenever you forgive people's sins, they are forgiven. Whenever you do not**

forgive them, they are not forgiven. Jesus provides deputies on earth to forgive sins or withhold forgiveness if a sinner does not repent. Concerning Christ’s “deputies” our catechism says, *I believe that, when this is done, it is as valid and certain in heaven also, as if Christ, our dear Lord, dealt with us himself.*

Saint Paul says something similar to the pastors in and around the city of Ephesus. When Paul met these men, he was at the end of his third mission journey. He wanted to encourage these pastors in person because he knew he would never see them again. So, Paul says to the pastors from Ephesus, **Always keep watch over yourselves and over the whole flock in which the Holy Spirit has placed you as overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood.**

Jesus is the Good Shepherd. Jesus is true God. Jesus *purchased and won you from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with his holy precious blood and innocent suffering and death.* You belong to Jesus and to Jesus alone. Yet, within his Church, Jesus, the Good Shepherd, also calls and ordains “deputy” shepherds. So, on this “Good Shepherd Sunday,” God’s Word says, **MAY THE GOOD SHEPHERD GIVE YOU GOOD SHEPHERDS.** May Jesus give you good pastors.

And that is what “pastor” means. “Pastor” is Latin for “shepherd.” But “pastor” is more than a title. “Pastor” is a job description. And even if you know nothing about sheep, you know what a shepherd does. The twenty-third Psalm tells you. A shepherd leads his flock to green pastures and refreshing water. A shepherd guides his flock along safe pathways. A shepherd guards and defends his flock from predators. A shepherd makes sure his flock has abundant food. At the end of the day, the shepherd leads his flock to the safety of the sheep-pen.

Spiritually speaking, that’s what Jesus wants his “deputy shepherd” to do for you. Jesus tells pastors: “Lead your flock to the green pastures of God’s Word and sacraments. Lead your people back to the refreshing water of baptism. In that baptism call them to repent. In that baptism forgive all their sins by my blood and by my authority. Keep your flock on the straight and narrow way that leads to eternal life. Correct them when they stray—even if that correction stings. Guard your flock against that spiritual, alpha-predator, *Satan, the roaring lion, who wants to devour*

their souls. Feed their faith with sermons, Bible classes, and personal devotions. Be by their side when they face sickness, sorrow, and death. Assure them that they **will dwell in the House of the Lord forever.**”

Now, no pastor ever does all that perfectly. Likewise, no congregation or church member follows their pastor perfectly. But Jesus is perfect. And Jesus deputizes your pastor to work among you for your benefit. Concerning pastors, the book of Hebrews says, **Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls as men who will give an account. Obey them, so that they may do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no benefit to you.**

So, do you want Jesus, the Good Shepherd, to bless you and your church? Of course, you do. Well, then, support the pastor. Pray for your pastor. Encourage your pastor. Trust his leadership. Give him the benefit of the doubt. Don't be a grump, nit-picking everything the pastor does. And don't jump ship and look for a new church because the pastor did something you did not fully agree with. Do not do that kind of stuff **for that would be of no benefit to you.**

This does not mean the pastor can do whatever he wants. The pastor is not the dictator. Saint Paul knew the dangers of a bad pastor. Paul warns the Ephesian pastors: **savage wolves, who will not spare the flock, will come in among you. Even from your own group men will rise up, twisting the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. Therefore, be always on the alert!**

In this broken, sinful world God's Church will always face the threat of false teachers. Now, false teachers might look good. They might sound good. They might even hold the position of pastor. But a false teacher is a wolf in sheep's clothing. And a wolf in sheep's clothing will only rip your faith to shreds. Truth-twisting, savage wolves will only drag you to hell.

So, on the one hand, Jesus expects you to follow, obey, support, and care for your faithful pastor. On the other hand, Jesus does not want you to be a naïve sucker who falls for the tricks and lies of smooth-talking, spiritual charlatans. **Therefore, be always on the alert!**

But notice this. Paul did not speak those words to church members. He spoke to the pastors in and around the city of Ephesus. Paul tells this group of pastors to watch out for false teachers from their own group. So, it was the duty of the pastors to hold each other accountable.

That is a blessing you enjoy. Your pastor is part of the Wisconsin synod. He is not a cowboy or lone ranger doing his own thing. Rather, as a pastor in the WELS, your pastor attends meetings, conferences, conventions, and so on. He gets together with other pastors quite often. And WELS pastors take Paul's words to heart. WELS pastors encourage each other. But they also watch over each so no false prophets emerge among us.

Of course, there is a good reason for all this. That reason is more than just making sure everybody falls in line and does their job. Certainly, God wants order and good behavior in his Church. But all this serves one vital purpose. It's all about Jesus. And Jesus says, **I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.**

It's all about the Good Shepherd, our Savior, Jesus Christ. The office of the holy ministry exists for one purpose and one purpose alone. Your "deputy" shepherd has the honor and the duty to bring you to the Good Shepherd and to bring the Good Shepherd to you.

And you need Jesus, your Good Shepherd. You need Jesus to forgive all your sins. You need Jesus to strengthen your faith by the gospel in Word and sacraments. You need Jesus to bring your children to faith through baptism. You need Jesus to give you his body and blood for your forgiveness, life, and salvation. You need Jesus to educate you and your children. You need Jesus to bless your marriages and your departure from this world. You need Jesus to guide you, protect you, discipline, and love you.

In his wisdom Jesus has deputized your pastor to do all this in his name and by his authority. Therefore, **MAY THE GOOD SHEPHERD GIVE YOU GOOD SHEPHERDS.** And may your pastor always give you Jesus and only Jesus. AMEN.