

Acts 13:15-16a, 26-33a, 38-39  
The Fourth Sunday of Easter  
Good Shepherd Sunday  
He Lives, All Blessings to Impart!

Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church  
Winchester, VA  
Pastor Paul Krueger  
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<sup>15</sup> After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the leaders of the synagogue sent word to them, saying, “Brothers, if you have a word of exhortation for the people, please speak.”

<sup>16</sup> Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said...

<sup>26</sup> “Fellow children of Abraham and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent. <sup>27</sup> The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath. <sup>28</sup> Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. <sup>29</sup> When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb. <sup>30</sup> But God raised him from the dead, <sup>31</sup> and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people.

<sup>32</sup> “We tell you the good news: What God promised our ancestors <sup>33</sup> he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus.

<sup>38</sup> “Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. <sup>39</sup> Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses.

**Grace and peace to you from Christ the Good Shepherd, our risen Lord and Savior. Amen.**

How has your past week gone? Has it been a good week or a bad one, a happy week or a sad one? Even in our best of weeks there are bound to be some disappointments, sorrows, or frustrations that we’re faced with. And yet, even in the worst of our weeks, there is always hope and joy for those who find themselves in the Good Shepherd’s flock.

Last week we heard about the conversion of a man named Saul who had been persecuting the early Christian church. As he was making his way to the city of Damascus in Syria, Jesus appeared to him and commissioned him to be an apostle one of His messengers of the gospel. It may have only been a week for us. But as we pick up Saul’s story in Acts 13, several years have passed for him. (It’s also in Acts 13 that Luke begins to refer to him by his Greek name, Paul, rather than his Hebrew name, Saul.) After Ananias had healed and baptized Paul, we’re told that **he began at once to preach in the synagogues of Damascus that Jesus is the Son of God** (Acts 9:20). Before long, however, the Jews began to conspire how they might kill him, but his disciples helped him to escape the city.

And then he started traveling. A lot! He went to Arabia to study the Scriptures and learn from the Lord, he went back to Damascus and then to Jerusalem, before going back through Syria to his homeland of Cilicia (on the Northeast corner of the Mediterranean Sea) where for fourteen years he preached the Word of God and met men like Titus and Barnabas. After another trip to Jerusalem with Barnabas, his life once again came under threat this time from the Jews in Jerusalem and he fled again to the North. In Antioch, Paul and Barnabas were called by the Holy Spirit to embark on what we refer to as “Paul’s first missionary journey.” They went first to the island of Cyprus before heading up to the region of Pamphylia where their fellow missionary, Mark, deserted them and left for home. Then, to add injury to insult, Paul got sick, bad enough to the point that it changed their travel plans and led them further inland to the cities of the Galatians which is where we find him today.

Our text this morning is a portion of Paul’s first recorded sermon. On the Sabbath day they went to one of the synagogues to worship. After reading from Moses and the Prophets as was the custom, the synagogue leaders invited them to get up and speak. The past twenty years had not been easy for Paul. This mission

journey so far had been discouraging and arduous, but the message He had to preach was one of joy and encouragement.

In part one of his sermon, he began with a brief history of the nation of Israel, showing how God's hand had been with them through the time of the patriarchs, of Moses and the Exodus, their entry into the Promised land, and the period of the judges and finally the kings, with King Saul and King David.

In part two, Paul gets to the climax of his message: **From this man David's descendants, he proclaimed, God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as He promised** (Acts 13:23). Jesus was the promised Messiah, Paul told them, the one about whom John the Baptist had testified, **There is One coming after me whose sandals I am not worthy to untie** (John 1:27).

Paul continued, **Fellow children of Abraham and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent. The people of Jerusalem and their leaders, recognizing neither this Jesus as the Messiah nor the words of the prophets that were read every Sabbath day, fulfilled those very prophecies by condemning Jesus to death (although no just grounds for His death had been established) and asked Pilate to have Him crucified. And when they had fulfilled all that had been written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and buried Him in a tomb.**

**But, Paul said, coming now to the very best part, God raised Him from the dead, and for many days He was seen by those who had traveled with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now His witnesses to our people. We [those witnesses] tell you the good news: What God promised our ancestors He has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus.** [Both in raising Him up as our Messiah—our Good Shepherd—and by raising Him up from the dead.] **Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through Him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses.**

Throughout the Old Testament period, God had foretold through His prophets the coming of a Savior often depicting Him as a Shepherd. Isaiah had written of a day when the LORD would **come in power to rule with a mighty arm. He tends His flock like a shepherd, Isaiah wrote, He gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them close to His heart; He gently leads those that have young** (Isaiah 40:10-11). Later, in words echoing our Psalm of the Day (Psalm 23), Isaiah tells us about the well-being of God's people in the days when He would send His Shepherd among them: Then, he said, **They will feed beside the roads and find pasture on every barren hill. They will neither hunger nor thirst, nor will the desert heat or the sun beat down on them. He who has compassion on them will guide them and lead them beside springs of water** (Isaiah 49:9-10).

The prophets Micah, Jeremiah, Zechariah, and Ezekiel are among others who would use this shepherd motif as they spoke of the coming Savior. And when Jesus came, He left us with no doubt that He was the One about whom those prophecies had spoken. In John 10 in the words just before our Gospel text this morning, Jesus told the people, **I am the Good Shepherd** (John 10:11,14), and then went on in detail to tell them what that meant.

First, by describing His relationship with His people as that of a Shepherd to His sheep, Jesus is assuring us that His relationship with us is a familiar one. **I know My sheep and My sheep know Me, He said, they listen to My voice and they follow Me** (John 10:14,27). Jesus knows you completely. He knows you and He knows your needs. And because He is your Good Shepherd, He will guide you by His Word to receive every blessing that you need at precisely the moment that you need it.

Jesus had received His sheep from His Father, and He would do whatever was necessary to protect them even if it meant laying down His life for them. That He had done, Paul reminded the congregation in front of Him, when He willingly went to the cross. As Isaiah had foretold, **He was oppressed and afflicted... He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He did not open His mouth to protest** (Isaiah 53:7). And here we find an interesting paradox. Together with Isaiah, the last of the Old Testament prophets, John the Baptist, pointed out Jesus not as a Shepherd, but as **the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!** (Jn 1:29).

In order to shepherd His flock and take away their sins, in order to impart to them the one blessing that they needed more than any other—salvation from sin and death—Jesus would lay down His life for His sheep. He would become the sacrificial Lamb, the atoning sacrifice to justify the world before God.

But what hope is there for a flock whose shepherd is dead? That is why the most important part of Paul's message for his Galatian audience was that God has raised Jesus from the dead! Because He lives, we can be confident that He is able to bring us all the blessings we need just as He has promised. Those blessings, Paul tells us include the forgiveness of sins, freedom from every trespass against God's law, and (going back to our Gospel text from this morning) the promise of Jesus' eternal presence with us and the gift of everlasting life: **I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of My Father's hand.**

Whether your past week was a good week or a bad one, whether this next one is a happy week or a sad one, whether your life in this world is relatively peaceful or long and arduous, know this: Jesus is your Good Shepherd. He laid down His life for you, and He lives. *He lives to silence all your fears; He lives to wipe away your tears. He lives to calm your troubled hearts; He lives, all blessings to impart!*

Because He lives, you and I can stand up like Paul and Barnabas did that day in Antioch in Galatia. We can witness to others what we know to be true: Jesus is our sacrificial Lamb and our risen Lord—our Good Shepherd. He will supply us with all our needs until the day He gathers us into His heavenly fold where together with all the saints and angels we will sing, **Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!** (Revelation 7:12).