

Christian MONTHLY

DEDICATED TO THE PROCLAMATION
OF THE WORD OF GOD



Psalm 119:105
Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,
and a light unto my path.

July 2015

The Good Shepherd

Pastor Rod Johnson
Laurium, Michigan

Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: **I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.** But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. **I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.** And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. **Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.**

John 10:7-18

WHAT A WONDERFUL, MARVELOUS REALITY that we have such a shepherd in Jesus Christ our Lord. He has also told us why He came, that we may have life and have it abundantly. This is His free gift to us as His people, as He consistently takes care of His own even unto eternal glory.

As we are reminded of this, we see that Jesus assures us with some very important words. 1) Abundant life. 2) He willingly, joyfully laid down His life for us. 3) He took it up again, as the Father sent Him to do. In all of this, He makes us to be ONE together with Him and the Father.

The additional blessing is this, that we—joined with Him—are also joined with one another in the unity of the Spirit and in the fellowship of His people. The thief comes to steal, plunder, kill and destroy. When we contrast the love and graciousness of the Lord to the destructive work of the devil, we have great reason to rejoice in the Lord's blessings, knowing that we are possessors of peace and joy in this life, and greater blessings in His presence for all eternity.

When we hear or read these words, *Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me (John 14:1)*, we have reason to be assured without fear that Jesus indeed as the Good Shepherd is going to care for us as His own.

May the peace of God, the love of His Son and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and forever. Amen.

In His peace.



The Shepherd's Love, StefyMante
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A Free People

the late Alvin Holmgren
August 1995 CM

FOR MORE THAN TWO HUNDRED YEARS, the citizens of our country have been blessed with great political freedom. The flags seen flying on front porches and in public places about the nation testify silently to this freedom, symbolizing our Constitution and way of life. They bring to mind a remarkable chain of historical events and the less tangible promise of political liberty.

From the revolutionary Declaration of Independence whose words are still borrowed by people fighting for their freedom, to the Articles of Confederation, the world's first written constitution of national government, and finally in the ratification of our present day Constitution, a document unparalleled in its time and still unique, we as Americans have a remarkable heritage of liberty. The men who signed the Declaration of Independence knew that they were risking their lives by associating their names with the treasonable document. The patriots who fought the British challenged the world's strongest power. Later, the framers of the Constitution had no way of knowing whether the document they drew up would



successfully protect both security and liberty. But God blessed our nation and we stand where we do today.

When settlers came to the new land, freedom of worship was one of their chief goals. It is our responsibility as Christians to pray for the leaders of our government so that we may continue to lead quiet and peaceable lives in godliness and honesty (1 Timothy 2:2). A symbol such as the flag helps us remember this. It embodies more meaning than we can express with words.

But as Christians, we have a heritage even greater than this in Christ, a freedom that we know is sure, that will last an eternity. The symbol of this spiritual freedom is the cross. It represents the redemptive work of our Savior Jesus Christ. The preaching of the cross represents not only His crucifixion, but His entire ministry beginning with the virgin birth and concluding with the ascension. In the preaching of the cross, we see the gospel message in its entirety as the Apostle Paul expressed in his letter to the Corinthians: *For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. (1 Corinthians 1:18)* Jesus came to free us from the bondage of unbelief and to loose us from the bands of sin. Jesus says to each of us today: *If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. (John 8:31-32) ~*

The Beauty of Holiness

Pastor Tom Lappi
Newberg, Oregon

O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth.

Psalm 96:9

THE SHARP CONTRAST between sin and holiness is everywhere in the Scriptures. Isaiah wrote, *Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. (Isaiah 1:18)* This psalm places before us a subject that is often obscured from our eyes, the beauty of holiness.

The enemy of the soul would like to hide this beauty from us, and dwell on our faults and shortcomings. We must readily say that he has somewhat of an easy job because our faults are many, and often on display.

Or, he cleverly allows us to see the beauty of our own ways, and masquerades this as holiness. With these schemes he has, and continues to, ply his craft today.

But the holiness that the psalmist speaks of is so much different. There is such a beauty to holiness in contrast to the ugliness of sin. It is a beauty we must see with eyes of faith, for we cannot see it with our natural eyes, or understand it with our minds.



This great difference prompted David to write in the first psalm that the godly person *shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water (verse 3)* instead of *like the chaff which the wind driveth away. (verse 4)* Jeremiah also wrote of this beauty, saying of the people of God: *their soul shall be as a watered garden. (Jeremiah 31:12)*

This beauty is most clearly revealed to us in Jesus our Lord, who came here as our Savior to free us from the

bondage of sin. He gives us a beautiful freedom from a self-centered existence to a life that, on occasion, allows us to think of another before ourselves. This is the life-long lesson we, as His disciples, learn. It is the very essence of Christ. For He said, *For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. (Mark 10:45)*

May we, together with Mary, the mother of our Lord, say, *For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. (Luke 1:49)*

Love and God's peace.

God's Thoughts

Pastor Jay Weidner
Laurium, Michigan

Sincere Praise

Isaac Watts

To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David.

1 O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known *me*. 2 Thou knowest my down-sitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. 3 Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted *with* all my ways. 4 For *there is* not a word in my tongue, *but*, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether. 5 Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. 6 *Such knowledge is* too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot *attain* unto it. 7 Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? 8 If I ascend up into heaven, thou *art* there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou *art there*. 9 If I take the wings of the morning, *and* dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; 10 Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. 11 If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. 12 Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light *are* both alike *to thee*. 13 For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. 14 I will praise thee; for I am fearfully *and* wonderfully made: marvellous *are* thy works; and *that* my soul knoweth right well. 15 My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, *and* curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. 16 Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all *my members* were written, *which* in continuance were fashioned, when *as yet there was* none of them. 17 How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! 18 *If* I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee. 19 Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God: depart from me therefore, ye bloody men. 20 For they speak against thee wickedly, *and* thine enemies take *thy name* in vain. 21 Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? 22 I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies. 23 Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: 24 And see if *there be any* wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Psalm 139:1-24

THIS PSALM IS VERY FAMILIAR to us, particularly vs. 14-16 and 23-24. When understood as a whole, the psalm has a wonderful theme. God is everywhere and knows everything. He knows what He's doing in every way and watches over us in every aspect of our existence, including our thoughts. David says all of this is apparent because God created us in a marvelous way by His own hand. He saw us while we developed in the womb and He sees us as we are now. David therefore recognizes that God knows his thoughts and he wants his thoughts to be like those of God.

God's thoughts are amazing, but even more amazing is that as we consider God's thoughts, God is always present with us (v. 18). David then says he's trying to see his enemies in a way he thinks conforms to God's understanding of them. David thinks his enemies are also God's enemies and seeks judgment upon them. Yet he understands that his thoughts may not be the same as God's, so he asks God to search his thoughts for wickedness to be sure he hasn't fallen into selfish deceit. David knows that his thoughts are not pure; only God can give purity to thought so he asks God to grant him that purity and direction. This is what God has done for us in Christ; He has given us the mind of Christ in a new creation (1 Corinthians 2:16). When we think on Christ we are in our right mind. David's request is answered by the giving of the Holy Spirit into the heart of every believer. Thanks be to God! ~

Almighty Maker, God!
How wondrous is Thy name!
Thy glories, how diffused abroad
Through the creation's frame!

Nature in every dress
Her humble homage pays,
And finds a thousand ways t' express
Thine undissembled praise.



In native white and red
The rose and lily stand,
And free from pride their beauties spread
To show Thy skilful hand.

The lark mounts up the sky
With unambitious song
And bears her Maker's praise on high
Upon her artless tongue.

My soul would rise and sing
To her Creator too,
Fain would my tongue adore my King
And pay the worship due.



But pride, that busy sin,
Spoils all that I perform;
Cursed pride that creeps securely in
And swells a haughty worm.

Thy glories I abate
Or praise Thee with design;
Some of the favours I forget
Or think the merit mine.

The very songs I frame
Are faithless to Thy cause,
And steal the honours of Thy name
To build their own applause.



Create my soul anew,
Else all my worship's vain;
This wretched heart will ne'er be true
Until 'tis formed again.

Descend, celestial fire,
And seize me from above,
Melt me in flames of pure desire,
A sacrifice to love.

Let joy and worship spend
The remnant of my days,
And to my God, my soul, ascend
In sweet perfumes of praise.

Jacob and Esau

Gwen Wilson
Ridgefield, Washington

Dear Children,

Hello to each of you. I hope you are well today. I want to share with you an account from *Genesis 25:20-34* about two boys who were twins.

DO YOU REMEMBER hearing about Abraham and Sarah? They did not have any children. They were married many years and grew very old. Did they want children? Oh yes. *Genesis 17:15-17: God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her. Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?* Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90 when they had their son Isaac.

Isaac was 40 years old when he married Rebekah. (Some say they were married 20 years and still had no children.) I'm sure Rebekah was sad that she did not have any children, and she and Isaac probably talked about this. Isaac could see his wife's sadness and wished they had even one child to love. Isaac experienced something similar to his father Abraham. *Genesis 25:21: Isaac intreated (begged) the LORD for his wife, because she was barren (not able to have children): and the LORD was intreated of him (heard his prayer), and Rebekah his wife conceived.*

As the months went on Rebekah could feel lots of baby movement. The Bible says the children (twins) struggled together within her. She asked the Lord, "Why is this happening?" *Verse 23: The LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner (kinds) of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger.*

Isaac was 60 when his sons were born. The first boy came out all red and hairy, and they named him Esau, which means *hairy*. Later he would get the name Edom, meaning *red*. After Esau came his brother Jacob. This second baby grabbed onto Esau's heel. Imagine seeing little Jacob grabbing onto his brother's heel. This was a sign that Jacob would overthrow Esau and there would always be a struggle between these brothers. The boys grew and Esau became a skilled hunter. He was most likely rugged and spent time out in the fields. Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents. Isaac loved Esau, because he could eat the meat he hunted and cooked. Rebekah loved Jacob more, probably because of his gentle, quiet nature.

One day when the boys were quite grown, Jacob was near the tents, and he had made some pottage, a thick soup of vegetables, and sometimes with meat. His brother Esau came in from hunting and was SO hungry, he felt faint. *Verse 30: Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom.* Jacob listened to his brother, but he was not going to give Esau food until he did something for him. Jacob told Esau to sell him his birthright.

You may be wondering what a birthright is. Esau was the first of the twins to be born, so typically the firstborn son would have the bigger share of his father's inheritance when he would leave home or his father would die. Inheritance could be money, cattle or goods. As Esau was the oldest son, he also had the responsibility of carrying out the promise given to Abraham, his grandfather, and Isaac, his father. But because Esau didn't see his birthright as being important, God made a way that His promise would be fulfilled, but in Jacob.

Esau shows up from a fruitless day of hunting, feeling like he is dying of hunger, and Jacob sees an opportunity to ask for Esau's birthright. *Verse 32: Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me?* Esau was so exhausted he felt his rightful inheritance would be of no use, so why not give it away? Jacob makes him swear to seal the deal, and the deed was done. Maybe Esau said something like this: "I swear this day that I sell my birthright to you my brother Jacob." Esau could not get it back and Jacob would now be first in line for the greater inheritance. This was part of God's plan that the elder, Esau, would serve the younger, Jacob.



The Lentil Stew, Matthias Stom

Esau then ate his fill of bread, pottage of lentils, and drink, and rose up and went on his way. The Bible says Esau despised his birthright (felt it was a worthless thing). Jacob would be blessed for choosing to care for the things that are important and Esau would have troubles as he turned his back on those things that really matter.

I encourage you to think about what is important. Pray to God to give you knowledge of good and evil. He will hear you and is ever waiting to lead you. I pray that Jesus will always live in your hearts by faith and that the devil will never be able to take away that faith.

One day Jesus will be coming back for all His children, and we will go to heaven with Him and live in His glory. It will be amazing! Press on, dear young ones. It will all be worth it. ~

The Good Shepherd

Paul Kretzmann

Commentary on John Chapter 10

JESUS CALLS HIMSELF THE GOOD SHEPHERD, with emphasis, as the only one that may bear this name with full justice. In this sense the name is applicable to Christ alone; He is the one most excellent Shepherd of the spiritual sheep. The first feature which distinguishes Him as the true Shepherd of souls is this, that He gives His life, His own soul, as a ransom, as the one complete sacrifice for the guilt of all sinners who have earned eternal damnation. He became their Substitute; He took upon Himself their transgressions and died in their stead. Thus the guilty, the sinners, were delivered from sin and destruction. In this respect Jesus incidentally is an example for all those that bear the name pastor as His assistants in the great work. For that purpose He also places Himself in deliberate contrast to the hirelings, the false teachers, the Pharisees. Such hirelings, whose sole concern is the money and the desire to take their ease in Zion, have no interest in the souls of men entrusted to their care. They are strictly mercenary and will work only so long as their lives and well-being seem to be safe. At the first sign of the wolf, at the first indication of real danger, of probable persecution, suffering, and even martyrdom, they turn in precipitate flight. The result is the dispersion and the murder of the sheep on the part of the enemies. But the hireling does not care; he has no worry, no anxiety for, no interest in, the sheep.

The second feature that distinguishes Jesus as the Good Shepherd, in contrast to all others, is the fact of the intimate acquaintance and knowledge between Him and His sheep. Just as Jesus knows them that are His, according to body, mind, and heart, so the believers know Jesus; their heart, their mind and will, is centered in Jesus, rests in Jesus. The expression fitly pictures the intimate, cordial relation and communion of love that obtains between Christ and His true disciples. This intimacy and communion is as close and embracing as that which exists between Father and Son. Their hearts and minds are open to each other; there is a mutual interchange of thoughts and ideas, all guided by a wonderful love. Thus it is between Christ and the believers. It is due to Christ's knowledge of the Father and His will that Jesus declares that He will lay down His life for the sheep. The ransom is paid for the sins of the whole world, but the believers alone take advantage of the mercy of the Savior, they alone obtain the grace of the Father. ~



The Good Shepherd
James Tissot

Good Tidings

Martin Luther

...And the poor have the gospel (the good tidings) preached to them.

Matthew 11:5

IT IS EASILY UNDERSTOOD THAT among the works of Christ none is greater than preaching the Gospel to the poor. This means nothing else than that to the poor the divine promise of grace and consolation in and through Christ is preached, offered and presented, so that to him who believes all his sins are forgiven, the law is fulfilled, conscience is appeased and at last life eternal is bestowed upon him. What more joyful tidings could a poor sorrowful heart and a troubled conscience hear than this? How could the heart become more bold and courageous than by such consoling, blissful words of promise? Sin, death, hell, the world and the devil and every evil are scorned, when a poor heart receives and believes this consolation of the divine promise. To give sight to the blind and to raise up the dead are but insignificant deeds, compared with preaching the Gospel to the poor. Therefore Christ mentions it as the greatest and best among these works.

But it must be observed that Christ says: "The Gospel is preached to none but to the poor only, thus without doubt intending it to be a message for the poor only." For it has always been preached unto the whole world, as Christ says, *Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.* (Mark 16:15) Surely these poor are not the beggars and the bodily poor, but the spiritually poor, namely, those who do not covet and love earthly goods; yes, rather those poor, broken-hearted ones who in the agony of their conscience seek and desire help and consolation so ardently that they covet neither riches nor honor. Nothing will be of help to them, unless they have a merciful God. Here is true spiritual weakness. They are those for whom such a message is intended, and in their hearts they are delighted with it. They feel that they have been delivered from hell and death.

Therefore, though the Gospel is heard by all the world, yet it is not accepted but by the poor only. Moreover, it is to be preached and proclaimed to all the world, that it is a message only for the poor, and that the rich men can not receive it. Whosoever would receive it must first become

poor, as Christ says (Matthew 9:13) that He came not to call the righteous but only sinners, although He called all the world. But His calling was such that He desired to be accepted only by sinners, and all He called should become sinners. This they resented. In like manner all should become poor who heard the Gospel, that they might be worthy of the Gospel; but this they also resented. Therefore the Gospel remained only for the poor. Thus God's grace was also preached before all the world to the humble, in order that all might become humble, but they would not be humble.



The Sermon on the Mount
Carl Heinrich Bloch

Hence you see who are the greatest enemies of the Gospel, namely, the work-righteous saints, who are self-conceited, as has been said before. For the Gospel has not the least in common with them. They want to be rich in works, but the Gospel wills that they are to become poor. They will not yield, neither can the Gospel yield, as it is the unchangeable Word of God. Thus they and the Gospel clash, one with another, as Christ says, *And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.* (Matthew 21:44)

Again, they condemn the Gospel as being error and heresy; and we observe it comes to pass daily, as it has from the beginning of the world, that between the Gospel and the work-righteous saints there is no peace, no good will and no reconciliation. But meanwhile Christ must suffer Himself to be crucified anew, for He and those that are His must place themselves, as it were, into this vise, namely, between the Gospel and the work-righteous saints, and thus be pressed and crushed like the wheat between the upper and nether millstones. But the lower stone is the quiet, peaceable and immovable Gospel, while

the upper stone is the works and their masters, who are ranting and raging.

With all this John contradicts strongly the fleshly and worldly opinion His disciples entertained concerning Christ's coming. They thought that the great king, whom John extolled so highly, namely, that the latchet of whose shoe he was not worthy to unloose (John 1:27), would enter in such splendor that everything would be gold and costly ornaments, and immediately the streets would be spread with pearls and silks. As they lifted up their eyes so high and looked for such splendor, Christ turns their look downward and holds before them the blind, lame, deaf, dumb, poor and everything that conflicts with such splendor, and contrariwise He presents Himself in the state of a common servant rather than that of a great king, whose shoe's latchet John considered himself unworthy to unloose, as though Christ would say to them: "Banish your high expectations, look not to My person and state, but to the works I do. Worldly lords, because they rule by force, must be accompanied by rich, high, healthy, strong, wise and able men. With them they have to associate, and they need them, or their kingdom could not exist; hence they can never attend to the blind, lame, deaf, dumb, dead, lepers and the poor.

"But My kingdom, because it seeks not its own advantage, but rather bestows benefits upon others, is sufficient of itself and needs no one's help; therefore, I can not bear to be surrounded by such as are already sufficient of themselves, such as are healthy, rich, strong, pure, active, pious, and able in every respect. To such I am of no benefit; they obtain nothing from Me. Yea, they would be a disgrace to Me, because it would seem that I needed them and were benefitted by them, as worldly rulers are by their subjects. Therefore, I must do otherwise and keep to those who can become partakers of Me, and I must associate with the blind, the lame, the dumb, and all kinds of afflicted ones. This the character and nature of my kingdom demand. For this reason I must appear in a way that such people can feel at home in My company. "

And now very aptly follow the words, *And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.* (Matthew 11:6) Why? Because Christ's humble appearance and John's excellent

To give sight to the blind and to raise up the dead are but insignificant deeds, compared with preaching the Gospel to the poor.

testimony of Christ seemed to disagree with each other. Human reason could not make them rhyme. Now all the Scriptures pointed to Christ, and there was danger of misinterpreting them. Reason spoke thus: Can this be the Christ, of whom all the Scriptures speak? Should He be the one, whose shoe's latchet John thought himself unworthy to unloose, though I scarcely consider Him worthy to clean my shoes? Therefore, it is surely true that it is a great blessing not to find occasion of stumbling in Christ, and there is here no other help or remedy than to look at His works and compare them with the Scriptures. Otherwise it is impossible to keep from being offended at Christ. ~

The Voice of the Good Shepherd

Lois Matson
Yacolt, Washington

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and **the sheep hear his voice**: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and **the sheep follow him: for they know his voice**. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers. This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them. Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. **I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine**. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.

John 10:1-15

STANDING IN THE GROCERY STORE, I hear my grown son speaking to his daughter in the next aisle. How do I know it is my son? I recognize his voice. I know what he sounds like. I hear him use the pet name that he calls his daughter.

Each of us has a unique voice, the tone produced by air passing over the vocal chords and formed into sounds by the tongue and lips. Sometimes a specific word or phrase will help to identify the speaker.

Do you know the voice of the Good Shepherd? Do you recognize His tone, His words, His distinct phrases? Do you hear the voice of Jesus?

The Good Shepherd calls you by name, though not necessarily with an audible voice from heaven. He calls you by His Word and Spirit, and by the mouths of His holy prophets, those of long ago and those who speak His Word today. When the Word is taught in truth and purity, He is

speaking to YOU. When the Sacraments are administered according to His command, it is for YOU. When repentance and the forgiveness of sins are proclaimed in His name, it is for YOU.

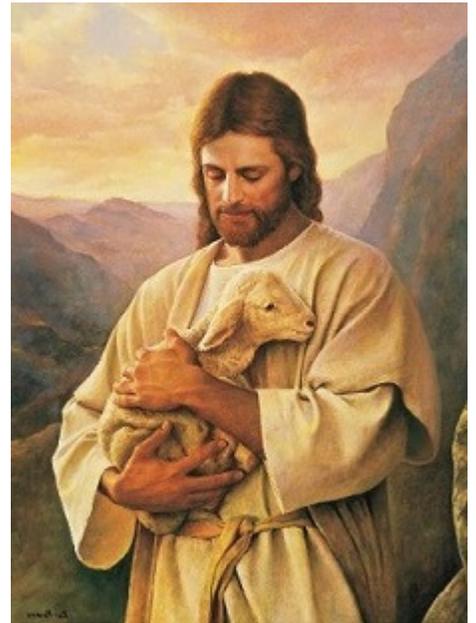
Christ our Shepherd leads His sheep. He goes before us, giving us rest in the best pastures and refreshing our souls beside the still waters. We stay near our Protector and Defender. He leads and we follow because we know His voice; it brings us comfort. He speaks peace to our sin-burdened hearts.

We flee the stranger's voice which does not promise peace with God through faith in the blood of Jesus. Any other remedy for sin is an empty promise with no lasting security. Those thieves and robbers want only to steal, kill and destroy. Our eternal death is their aim, and they will use any means to procure that end. Though the phrases may be flowery, we do not recognize them as the words of Jesus who is

always saying, "It is finished. Your sins are forgiven. Go in peace. Sin no more. I give you life, abundant life."

The Good Shepherd gave His life for the sheep. He paid our sin debt with His own blood. He laid down His life according to the will of the Father. The Good Shepherd did not flee in the face of the wolf, the enemy of the sheep. He did not leave His sheep to be caught and scattered. He cares always for His sheep.

Our Good Shepherd calls us by name, and we know His voice. Hear His voice tenderly calling, encouraging and speaking peace to you today. ~



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Vocation

Kenneth A. Cherney, Jr.

Excerpt from "Uncovering Our Calling: Luther's Reformation Re-emphasis on Christian Vocation"

IT IS SOMETIMES ASKED WHETHER the doctrine of vocation belongs under the Law or the Gospel. To understand how Luther might have answered, bear in mind that our vocation has nothing at all to do with the question of how we come to stand in a right relationship with God. That answer is found solely in the Gospel...

But rather than to claim that vocation simply "is" the Gospel, it would be more accurate to say that our vocation is one of many things that the Gospel sets free. Now that we are saved by God's free grace in Christ, we no longer feel any pressure to turn our vocation into what it is not: a way of earning favor from God.

At that moment, freedom from anxiety about my own salvation releases a pent-up flood of spiritual energy, which can now be directed toward serving my neighbor in my calling. In this way the Gospel gives us *carte blanche* to do good works. It changes service to God and our neighbor from a morbid, self-centered enterprise into one motivated by genuine love. It converts the hard work of religion into the joyful response of a heart set free. Now at last I begin to fulfill the purpose for which I was created, to be good for something and to somebody.

Here is a typically Lutheran paradox. I enjoy God's favor most when I am thinking least about earning favor from God. I am purest at those moments when striving for purity, as the monks understood it, is the furthest thing from my mind.

Therefore though a common laborer, a shoemaker, or a blacksmith may be dirty and sooty or may smell because he is covered with dirt and pitch, still he may sit at home and think: "My God has made me a man. He has given me my house, wife, and child and has commanded me to love them and to support them with my work." Note that he is pondering the Word of God in his heart; and though he stinks outwardly, inwardly he is pure incense before God. (AE 21:34.)

It is God's task to justify us, not ours, and it always has been. It is when we manage to leave it to Him and to mind our own business that we bask in His favor.

Therefore leave the angels up there in heaven undisturbed. Look for them here on earth below, in your neighbor, father and mother, children, and others. Do for these what God has commanded, and the angels will never be far away from you. (AE 21:36.)

What exactly, then, is "my business"? It is that task—and only that task—that is laid on me every day by my God. To recognize our vocation, two things are necessary: 1) to open our ears and listen carefully to what God says in His Word, and 2) to open our eyes, look around, and observe where it is in life that God has put us. Conversely, confusion about our vocation results when we become dissatisfied either with God's Word or with our station and set either of these aside...

For Luther, faith includes both the confidence that God is pleased with me as a person and the confidence that God is pleased with what I do. How can I ever be sure of this if I set aside what God's Word reveals about His will for my life, and invent good works of my own?

But one must keep in mind the axiomatic statement that whatever is not done out of faith is sin (Rom. 14:23). Faith, however, cannot be separated from the Word. Therefore whatever is done without the Word is sin. ~



Blacksmith, Boston Public Library
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Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith: To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen.

Romans 16:25-27