

Matthew 7:15-29

May 25, 2008 – 2<sup>nd</sup> SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

## Sheep Judge Their Shepherds

‡ By their fruit (vv.15-23)

‡ Trusting God's Word and promise (vv.24-29)

In the name of Christ our Good Shepherd, our solid Rock, dearly redeemed children of God:

People often say religious folks were just born into their faith, like your family car. If your dad always drove Fords, so will you. No doubt, many would fit that mold. But what about the multitudes who rebel against such stereotypes? In the “Perpetual prayer movement” one adherent says, “I think a lot of people have been turned off by the traditions of church: the dos and don'ts, the lectures.” So the “Perpetual prayer movement” gathers in warehouses, theaters, nightclubs far away from liturgies or “pastors leading discussions about Scripture.” For them even the word “prayer” is a matter of interpretation – journaling, dance, art. They want a “more spiritual and personal connection” with God.<sup>1</sup>

Can you really blame anyone for wanting to be close to God? But is it the God of the Bible? In both the Old and New Testaments, He reveals Himself as a “*consuming fire*” (Deuteronomy 4:24; Hebrew 12:9). How close can you get to a “*consuming fire*”? Any religion that ignores that fact is as made up as a car you drew on a piece of paper to gets 10,000 mpg. Longing to save gas won't start the engine. So how can anyone know whether to stick with the family faith? What's the best way to go?

Jesus, God's Son, will answer our questions today with powerful word pictures that teach us not to be victims. First of all, He lays out this strange irony that **Sheep Judge Their Shepherds**<sup>2</sup> ...

‡ By their fruit (vv.15-23)

From the very beginning there have been other voices, heretics in the church. In Adam's church it was Cain who murdered Abel. In Noah's church, his disrespectful son Ham. Among God's chosen Israelites as soon as good times came, false teachers credited their idols, then blamed the bad times on the LORD God. Isn't it amazing how human beings can be so sure of themselves in spiritual matters while all our intellectuals and politicians put together can't seem to settle the economy or lower gas prices?

We don't like to admit some things are just beyond our ability to understand, much less fix. But when it comes to saving our eternal souls, we either go along to get along or turn away without any idea where we're going or how we got here. Personally, I appreciate the mercy of God who sent His Son to teach us the way to heaven. Jesus says, “*I am the way*” (John 14:6), then guards and keeps us on the way.

“*Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.*” God can see your faith is not like the family car. To blindly follow religious leaders just because your parents did, or because they grab your attention, could put you in the jaws of a wolf in sheep's clothing. His engaging personality or outwardly holy life may just be a cover-up for a rabid heart. But how can you know? Jesus helps again with this: “*By their fruit you will recognize them.*” The “*fruit*” of a prophet is the word of his mouth. Does it match the message of God's own Son, the last and ultimate Prophet of God? (Deuteronomy 18:15; Hebrew 1:1f) Does he show you your sin and the wrath of God? How God's “*consuming fire*” fell on Jesus in our place to save us from God's wrath forever?

Some of the most savvy people prove we are all just sheep who love to wander. We tend to assume that if sermons are interesting, the pastor is friendly, his life looks holy, and, Wow! if he can do miracles, then he must be telling the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Yet, while Jesus the Good Shepherd teaches us that His **Sheep Judge Their Shepherds**, He also warns, “*Not everyone who*

<sup>1</sup> By Joel Hood, *Chicago Tribune*, May 2008.

<sup>2</sup> This theme was borrowed from a sermon by C.F.W. Walther, founder of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod.

*says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."* And what is the work and will of the Father? *"To believe in the one he has sent."* (John 6:29 NIV) God's Son Jesus warns, *"Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"*

The Holy Spirit tells us, *"Without faith it is impossible to please God"* (Hebrews 11:6). Unless we have been adopted by faith into God's family, we cannot do anything good. In fact, it's far worse. The way the Righteous Judge, Jesus Christ, sees it, unbelievers *keep energetically working* nothing but *lawlessness*. And He's not talking about secular humanists who will face God's fire soon enough. Jesus is here condemning the highly religious, morally superior individuals who do not put their faith in Jesus as the only Righteousness that counts before God. For all their spiritual athleticism, without faith in Jesus as their personal Savior, they are running the wrong track toward a finish line far away from God forever.

*"Watch out for false prophets..."* Healthy **Sheep Judge Their Shepherds...**

### ✠ **Trusting God's Word and promise (vv.24-29)**

Did you notice that both these builders came to church? Both sat where you are sitting and heard the same messages year after year. Jesus describes both as *"everyone who hears these words of mine."* Isn't it time for us to stop thinking about everyone else who should be here listening? Focus on this for you. Both builders hear Jesus' words, but when they leave, one thinks church is done, the other is convinced it's time to get to work **Trusting God's Word and promise**.

Have you ever known someone who gets his family to church okay, but rarely mentions the message or shows any care about living it between Sundays? One president of a congregation told me years ago that he did not go to Bible class because, "You can get too much of that stuff, you know?" Even as a teenager I couldn't help saying, "You ought to be ashamed of yourself." His history has shown God's Word is true. It only takes a couple gusts of wind tripping over themselves and stumbling into the man's house. It *"fell with a great crash"* because he built on the sand of personal opinion.

But the other man, Jesus describes, knows how to use a shovel. According to Jesus' parallel account in Luke, this man *"dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built."* (Luke 6:48 NIV) Christians are targets for evil forces. These winds are not tripping into his house. They blast down hard in torrents of trouble, wave upon wave. Yet their full force and fury cannot tear up his faith life. His house *"did not fall because it had its foundation on the rock."* He's the man who not only made sure he came regularly and frequently to hear God's Word. He absolutely insisted on putting it into practice in his every day life. He built on the Rock which is Jesus Christ, and no force of hell could bring him down.

There is still reason to be amazed at Jesus' teaching. He can confuse the wise and learned in their conceit, while opening the eyes of the spiritually blind. The Good Shepherd laid down His life for His sheep, then took it up again as our risen and ascended Lord. At God's right hand Jesus still rules all things for the good of His Church. And every once in while we get to see this in living color.

You may remember a few weeks ago we prayed for Christians in the Amazon jungle of Peru. Their leaders had walked for hundreds of miles to bring ELS Missionary Terry Schultz to teach them about Jesus. But their land was threatened by an unscrupulous developer who would strip the forest into a palm plantation and give the natives assembly line jobs for subsistence salaries. They prayed and went to work. One Sunday school teacher led other women in peaceful protests to bring this to light. One of our native seminary students went trembling to have their surveyed village deed signed by the mayor. He asked for enough land to support a growing village where low addiction rates and God's peace surround a Lutheran school and children learn of Christ just like ours. Miracle of miracles, the land developer crumbled, the corrupt government caved, and God's people still have their forests and trees to live here on their way home to heaven. Build on the Rock which is Christ. He saved our souls. Amen.