

Acts 13:15-16a,26-33

April 21, 2013 – 4th SUNDAY OF EASTER, Good Shepherd Sunday

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CW 436

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The Good Shepherd Leads by Law and Gospel

† **Jesus died for His sheep. (vv.15-16a,26-29)**

† **Jesus rose for us and our children. (vv.30-33)**

In the name of Jesus, the Shepherd of our bodies and souls, dearly redeemed sheep of His pasture:

Two things keep coming up when people criticize God. Americans, Chinese, whatever – all of us are severely limited by human reason. We cannot fit the infinite God into our finite minds. We cannot grasp how God can be unlimited love and have unlimited power. Human intelligence argues that if God is really loving and all-powerful, He should end all suffering. By that logic none of us would be alive today. Like a candle in the wind God would have snuffed out the human race when Adam and Eve sinned and brought suffering into God's perfect creation. Christians persecuted after Jesus ascended, could not have argued for God to end all suffering. Otherwise, their persecutor, the violent Saul of Tarsus, would never have become Paul, God's missionary to us Gentiles. Human reason needs to be sanctified, made holy by God's grace. We need the scales to fall from our eyes as they did for Saul in last week's sermon (Acts 9:1-19a). We need to see ourselves as sheep in God's care. Then we can appreciate this awesome truth: **The Good Shepherd Leads by Law and Gospel.** See God's infinite love in this:

† **Jesus died for His sheep. (vv.15-16a,26-29)**

It must have been eleven or twelve years after his conversion that Saul was sent by God through Christians in Antioch of Syria on his First Missionary Journey with Barnabas. By now he's called Paul whom God used to reach all of us non-Jews with the promised Messiah of Israel. Paul and Barnabas would come to a town like Antioch in Pisidia and go to the synagogue. Jews scattered throughout the world honored God by reading Scripture lessons from the Law of Moses and writings of the Prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Habakkuk, Malachi. The synagogue ruler would ask traveling teachers: ***"Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak."*** Paul stood and signaled attention.

In the verses between our text Paul reviews 450 years of Jewish history from going into Egypt, Moses and the Exodus out, through the judges who first ruled in the Promised Land. Then quickly Paul recounts 1000 years from Jesus' ancestor King David to Christ's forerunner John the Baptizer who preached repentance and baptism. ***"As John was completing his work he said, 'Who do you think I am? I am not the one. No, but he is coming after me, whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.'"***

Paul calls for their attention again: ***"Brothers, children of Abraham, and you God-fearing Gentiles...."*** He could just as well have said, "All you Americans glued to your TVs during the terrorist manhunt in Boston...." Confused media anchors and psychologists try to figure out why two brothers set off bombs that killed little kids and policemen, but God has the answer right here in His Word. It's the same thing that was missing when they condemned and crucified God's Son: They have no fear of God.

Like it or not, God is showing us the whole human race in Paul's letter to the Romans: ***"All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one. Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes."*** (3:12-18 NIV84) Even if we never murder anyone, we lie to ourselves and to each other about how good we are.

Without true fear of God, ***"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. Though they***

found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb.”

That’s what religious people do when we rely on human reason instead of God’s truth. When we question God’s goodness, or doubt His infinite love, we miss God’s great salvation standing right there in the Person of His Son. No one ever did as many miracles as Jesus. No one ever loved so selflessly as He – healing the sick, raising the dead, and finally pouring out His life blood for a world of sinners gone astray. No one forced Jesus to do this. Jesus promised months before He died: *“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen.”* That’s us Gentiles! *“I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”* (John 10:14–18 NIV84)

Jesus came to the goal of sacrificing Himself in our place and He did not flinch. He said, *“It is finished!”* because God’s love is infinite. Every sin must be punished, not just terrorism, but every hateful thought, every slanderous word, every time we failed to encourage someone or help our neighbor in need. Not one of us by nature can do perfect good that counts before God. That is the unflinching, all-condemning truth of God’s holy Law. We need to see the kind hearted, infinite love of God that punished all our sins on Jesus when He **died for His sheep**. Now the really Good News is His infinite power:

‡ **Jesus rose for us and our children.** (vv.30-33)

God’s holiness terrorizes our conscience, but His mercy soothes our soul. The Good Shepherd seeks His sheep when we are cast down in guilt and fear. He finds us stuck in sorrow and picks us up in His strong arms. He holds us close like a little lamb. He sets us back on our feet with power no sheep could muster or comprehend. God’s infinite power raised Jesus from the dead and now gives us new life in Baptism, *“the Holy Spirit’s washing of rebirth and renewal.”* (Titus 3:5) *“Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.”* (Ephesians 2:4f NIV84) After all we did to God’s Son by our sins, *“God raised him from the dead.”* Hope for us and our children rests on His resurrection.

“We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm: “ ‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father.’” Infinite love planned this in eternity; in time infinite power fulfilled it.

Are you sharing this message of **Law and Gospel** with your family and friends? **The Good Shepherd Leads by Law and Gospel**. By word and example we need to teach our children first to say, “I’m sorry,” when they’ve done wrong or failed to do right. But for Jesus’ sake, don’t stop there.

As I hugged my five-year-old grandson, “Good-bye,” he whispered, “I’m sorry, Grandpa.” “What for, Dane?” “I’m sorry for crying yesterday.” “Dane, that’s why Jesus died for us. He washed away all our sins with His blood. They’re all gone. He will never remember them again. I forgive you, and best of all, Jesus forgives you. Today is a new day as if you never did anything wrong.” Grace hugs us!

Jesus rose for us and our children – also for our daughters unable to go to work in Watertown, Massachusetts, this past Friday. Katie said the two brothers drove up their street in the early morning hours. They were awakened by gunfire a block or two away as the older brother was shot and killed. She and husband Anthony live in the twenty block area searched all day. The boat where they finally found the younger brother is nearer where she and our daughter Sarah work. Glued to the TV all day? I was too. But no matter what happens, we trust God’s infinite love by faith in His forgiveness and His infinite power to protect and guide our lives. Pray for those who grieve. Pray for God’s protection. Pray for the Holy Spirit’s success as **The Good Shepherd Leads by Law and Gospel**. Amen.