

THE GOOD SHEPHERD



Sermon on Sunday of the Good Shepherd

1 Peter 5, 1-4 To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: ² Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; ³ not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

An age-old question that we always grapple with is, "If God is both almighty and loving, how come there is so much suffering in the world? Or asked in another way. Could God not demonstrate his almighty love in a more powerful way?" This question points to a fundamental problem - that our world, in its current state, is in a total leadership crisis. When asked what God has to do with all of this and why he doesn't do more to improve the world, we get a clear description of the "is" state of our world from the Bible. Namely, that we are like sheep without a shepherd! The Bible's answer to this human condition is the parable of the Good Shepherd.

What a shepherd had to do was well-known in old times. He had to take care of his flock and graze them because the sheep often didn't know where the best water and grass was. In other words, the shepherd had to lead them to where they could find the best food. In addition, when necessary, he had to protect against robbers and predators with vigor and physical force. For the Christian community, there should also be such shepherds who protect against dangers and seek the best for their flock. Jesus gave people authority to do exactly this work. In the New Testament, there were many such helpers of Jesus. They were called elders. When speaking of elders, it was always in the plural because there were many.

Of course, fathers and mothers are also such shepherds for their children. People who have taken on the sponsorship of a baptized Christian are also such shepherds. They have a special duty to look after the spiritual and physical well-being of the children. In the early Christian community, elders were also responsible for ensuring that the poor, weak, and sick received their due. In the most comprehensive sense, the elders had to ensure that the Christian congregation received spiritual and physical nourishment. It was about making sure that people not only received food for their bodies, but also for their souls. Through them, a little bit of heaven and a little bit of light became visible in this world.

It is crucial that such shepherds of God in the church always knew the mission they stood for. They received authority from Jesus, but it was an authority based on the powerlessness of the shepherds themselves. Only powerless shepherds who know the state of the world and themselves know that they can only live from the one chief shepherd Jesus and depend on him entirely. We are all sheep of the shepherd Jesus Christ and will return to him. Therefore, we do everything, whether through words or deeds, in his shadow, his word, and his mission. But as sheep, we often forget that we should act that way. Instead, we reverse roles and try to exert our authority over others, sometimes using the Good Shepherd only as a tool. We use Jesus only as an extension of what we want. This begins with the education of our children, where we use Jesus as a tool of power to raise our children as we want - not from the heart or out of love, but out of compulsion. Peter denounces such education by force. The result is a distorted image of a shepherd as a top boss who records our failures precisely and does not approve when we are naughty. This behavior is not only found in child education but also in other places of responsibility. The wishes of so-called shepherds are often different from Jesus will. They want influence, to become bigger, and to have more money. Is this also what the Good Shepherd wants? No, he says clearly: "Feed my sheep" and pay attention to what the sheep need. And what they need, Jesus, the shepherd, has repeatedly demonstrated, he will give them. Sick people came to him, and he said: „Your sins are forgiven!" and those people were healed in body and soul. In those times where Christians have forgotten to say these words on behalf of Jesus, we can only get lost in our own senseless goals. We need firm conviction that the shepherd Jesus Christ did not just send minions to pose as Christians while hiding himself in the 7th heaven. No, we need the conviction that he himself is physically present where his words are present - just as expressed in the 23rd Psalm: "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.." This does not mean that we are spared hardships, fears, illnesses and even death. It means that even in our darkest hours we can find ourselves in his loving arms and that his love can never fail. Initially, the age-old question was asked of how God can be almighty and loving while allowing suffering. God gives no logical answer to this question. However, he replies with the parable of the shepherd. In the early Church, the most well known work of art was the image of the Good Shepherd holding the wounded sheep in his arms. This image was not intended to explain or excuse the suffering and hurt. No, the good shepherd simply takes the sheep in his arms and in his arms all questions fall silent. This means that we as a church can only act out of the great arms of our Lord, in our whole being. We have nothing else to offer the world than that. The letter of Peter also exhorts us as parents, leaders and shepherds to focus everything on the archshepherd, not by coercion but as an example. A role model does not have to force, but only do what is natural: throw yourself into the arms of the Lord. Everything else comes by itself. As Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me." The shepherd's voice was of great importance to a sheep in Israel. Different shepherds often came to a watering hole with their flocks. As a shepherd moved on, he would lure his sheep with his voice or his whistle. His sheep already knew that call and moved on. The other sheep, who didn't know that voice, didn't listen to that voice and stayed behind. The shepherd's voice separated his sheep from the sheep of the other shepherds. So it was important that a sheep could hear the voice of its shepherd. When we can no longer distinguish the voice of Jesus from other voices, we are lost. If we don't listen to the voice of Jesus, we no longer know what is right and what is wrong. Then we are torn apart and can no longer find our way to heaven. The sheep cannot know the shepherd overnight. It takes time to build a relationship. You have to see in your own life that the shepherd not only wants to help, but can help. Only then does trust develop, so that they can follow happily and without compulsion. Again and again Jesus pointed to this oneness with the shepherds and with God the Father. Jesus was closely related to the Father and one with him. Whoever saw Jesus also saw the Father. The relationship of the Father with the Son becomes the model for

the relationship of Jesus with his own. To know also means to become one. The Lord's Supper shows us clearly what is meant by this. Jesus connects fully with us, also physically. He becomes one with us. There we can learn what it means to be good elders, parents, leaders and shepherds. We should always be sheep ourselves, go to Jesus and hear his voice. We also receive the wonderful unity that he gives us. Of course, as a shepherd and as a parent in charge, I don't always agree with Jesus. It happens again and again that I want to tear myself away from his hands and follow my own ideas. Yet Jesus sees the other reality in me and says: "You are one who has been cleansed with my blood." Because of this, the same Spirit that is in heaven with Jesus and has been from eternity to eternity is also in me. Jesus sees how I should really become one with his death, resurrection and spirit. Of course, this also applies to all other Christians, to all the sheep in his flock. We cannot understand it, much less prove it. But Jesus tells us: "You are mine," he tells us openly. "I have called you by name." Therefore it is true. Amen