

You're Safe in the Shepherd's Arms

John 10:22-30

May 11, 2025 (Easter 4-C)

St. Paul's Lutheran, North Freedom

Then came the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon's Colonnade. The Jews gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."

Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can 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. I and the Father are one." (John 10:22-30, NIV84)

Dear friends, followers of Jesus Christ, our Good Shepherd:

A fierce thunderstorm was crashing down one night. After one bolt of lightning struck close by, followed by a great boom of thunder, the two little kids screamed and ran out of their bedroom to Mom and Dad's bedroom. They snuggled in with Mom and Dad, and Mom held her two little ones, soothing them, "There, there. You're safe in my arms." Even as the thunder still rolled, the kids started to relax and soon fell asleep in Mommy's arms.

On this Mother's Day we give thanks to our Lord for our mothers and all they've done for us: How they've nurtured us, fed and clothed us, raised us and kept us safe. Today is also Good Shepherd Sunday. In today's gospel reading Jesus describes how he is the Good Shepherd. Like the mom who cared for her kids in the thunderstorm, Jesus soothes us with his voice. He tells us, **"You're Safe in the Shepherd's Arms."**

This all took place in the temple courtyards of Jerusalem in early winter during the Feast of Dedication, known to us as Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights. A group of Jews who did not believe in Jesus surrounded him, demanding that he tell them plainly if he was the Christ, the long-promised Messiah. But they didn't want to find out so they could believe in him. They wanted to have him put to death. If Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, they thought they could charge him with blasphemy, a crime worthy of death in their books. But Jesus pointed out how he didn't need to say it. The words he had spoken, the miraculous deeds that he did all spoke for him and pointed out he was the Christ. *"But you do not believe because you are not my sheep,"* Jesus concluded.

How is it that any of us could become one of Jesus' sheep? It's only by the grace of God. For we too were, in Isaiah's words, "like sheep" who "have gone astray, each has turned to his own way" (Isa. 53:6a). We were lost in our sinfulness, unable to find our way to God and to heaven. That's when Jesus, the eternal Son of God, came. He pointed out to the Jews a few months earlier, "I am the Good Shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me... and I lay down my life for the sheep" (Jn. 10:14,15). In our text Jesus pointed out again: *"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me."* It's all thanks to Jesus, who knew us personally and with the Holy Spirit called us by the gospel that we are now brought into his fold.

When we are struggling with Satan's temptations, when we're frightened by this stormy world, figuratively and literally, listen to your Shepherd's voice. In the gospel you hear him calling you: "I'm here! I know you, and I will never leave you." It gives us such a comfort to hear that in his Word. In this world filled with strange, conflicting voices, we recognize the voice of our Shepherd, soothing us, calling us to follow him. A children's hymn expresses it so well: "I am Jesus' little lamb, ever glad at heart I am, for my Shepherd gently guides me, knows my need and well provides me, loves me every day the same, even calls me by my name" (CW #804 v. 1).

Now listen to what your Shepherd promises in his Word: "*I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish.*" What a gift from our Good Shepherd! We wandering, sinful sheep deserve death and eternal death. But our Lord promises to give us eternal life! Even after we die, we shall never perish but will one day be raised to eternal life. We know this will happen because Jesus as our Shepherd laid down his life for the sheep, "only to take it up again" (John 10:17). Jesus rose! And so Jesus will one day raise us up too. Even when death comes, you're safe in the shepherd's arms, the risen Lord who gives eternal life to all who believe in him.

A further promise reassures us: "*No one can snatch them out of my hand.*" Picture fierce predators of the sheep: Wolves, bears, lions on the prowl, looking to snatch a defenseless sheep or lamb to have it for lunch. What about Satan, the devil who "prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour" as the Bible says (1 Pe. 5:8)? What about fierce enemies of the church who attack the Christian faith and try to undermine our relationship with God? If we were left by ourselves, we would indeed be snatched by them. But Jesus, our Shepherd, is stronger than all our enemies. So we rely not on our own strength, but on Jesus and his Word. No one can pluck us out when we're safe in the arms of our Shepherd.

Then Jesus tells us even more reason why we're safe in the Shepherd's arms. "*My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one.*" Here Jesus gave the Jews testimony about himself as God's Son. Though Jesus and the Father are separate persons, they are indeed one—one in essence. With the Holy Spirit, the Father and the Son are one God. As God the Father is almighty, so is the Son and the Holy Spirit. As God the Father is omnipresent (present everywhere), so is God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. So when Jesus promises that no one can snatch us out of his hands, we can take that to the bank.

We do hear about some former Christians who fall away from the faith. Did Jesus somehow fail in his promise? Not at all. A person can fall away from the faith, but it happens when they themselves wriggle out of the Savior's grasp; our Lord is not at fault. That should remind us that our Lord's promise is not meant for us to become over-confident and complacent in the faith, but rather to be assured of God's love and hold on to our Savior, who holds on to each of us.

Our earthly fathers and mothers are a great comfort for us and care for their children. But even the best parents aren't perfect. We falter. We can't guarantee complete safety for our kids. That's not in our power. But it is in the power of God the Father and his Son Jesus. And Jesus does guarantee it. Even when storms strike, when heartache happens, even at the time of death, our loving Shepherd has us in his arms. He promises to make everything turn out all right. Listen to his voice, and be assured that nothing will snatch you from your Shepherd's arms. Amen.