

When our youth go on a mission trip, we wear t-shirts that identify us as a group.

Each day is a different color – a bright color – so that we can easily find one another in a crowd.

But those t-shirts don't help if a person is lost, out of sight.

Then, the only way to search is by calling the person's name.

Sheep don't wear colored t-shirts.

And in Jesus' day, they didn't brand them.

Often, several flocks would be grazing in the same area, so they got all mixed up.

At the end of the day, how did the shepherds get the right sheep to follow them home?

The shepherds called out their names and the sheep knew the distinct voice of their shepherd.

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Now, I don't suppose you came to church today to learn about animal husbandry, but it is God who brought the subject up.

And for good reason.

Often the Lord God refers to his beloved people as sheep.

- Sheep that God has delivered into life,
- named
- and called together into flocks with under-shepherds to watch over them and keep them safe.

In the church, we call this delivering,
naming, and gathering into community
the Sacrament of Holy Baptism.

By Baptism, we are brought into the flock where we are fed and protected from the dangers to our eternal life.

In the flock of the church,

- we are called by name.
- we are taught by Jesus, our Shepherd
- we learn from the Holy Spirit through God's Word
- we are protected through prayer
- we are fed by the Good Shepherd, Jesus, himself.
- For us sheep, grains are turned into bread;
 - and bread becomes the **life-giving body** of Jesus Christ, sacrificed for us.
- For us sheep, water is turned into wine;
 - and wine becomes the **forgiving blood** of Jesus Christ shed for us.

Here, in the flock over which Jesus is the Good Shepherd,

- we hear our name,
- hear his voice,
- hear his call to "Come, follow me..",
- drink from the fountain of life and
- eat from the table of deliverance.

But unlike sheep, we can choose to follow the Shepherd or not.

And sometimes we get scattered, confused by false teaching and empty promises.

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Through the prophet Ezekiel, God has strong and harsh words for those he put in charge of his flock who

- abuse the sheep,
- who care nothing for the poor and the weak
- who seek only to make themselves fat and rich,
- and who care nothing about warning the people of danger.

Those shepherds will be rooted out and destroyed.

And following the maxim – if you want a job done right, do it yourself –

The Lord God says this:

“I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out.

²³ I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. ²⁴ And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken.

So it is that Jesus – of the house of David – is the one shepherd over all of God’s people.

As shepherd he feeds,

leads,

heals, and protects.

But he is also prince

– not in the sense of son of the king

– **but in the sense of being first – exalted – supreme – the chief ruler.**

Jesus comes to search, call,

name, feed,

heal, protect

and rule over the people God has chosen to love.

Jesus pays special attention to those

- who have suffered from a famine of God's Word
- Who have been harmed by the wolves of atheism and other forms of unbelief
- or who are weak from the onslaughts of life.

He feeds the hungry and gives drink to the thirsty, who seek life.

He binds up the wounds of those who faced the jaws of the wolf, that ancient enemy who masquerades as good while doing evil.

And how does the Good Shepherd, the King of God's people do all of this?

- With his voice.
- With his word in Scripture.
- With his life as example
- With his life as sacrifice and first-fruits of eternal life.

This is why listening to God's Word is so important!

As God's beloved sheep, we are scattered in the world – mingling with all sorts of people –

But many of those we mingle with are on the way to destruction.

- Some don't believe there is the God who raised Jesus from the dead.
- Others place their trust in other deities.
- Some are superstitious, dealing in crystals, horoscopes, or palm readings as the basis for their faith and hope for the future.
- Others seek their greatest good in the stuff of this world;
- And still others believe only in themselves and live only for themselves.

By all appearances, these folks may live great lives, prospering and flourishing.

But do not be deceived – when they die, they perish.

There is nothing more for them –

they had their reward during their lifetime.

And do not be discouraged if your life as a sheep appears weak and lowly, or starved and injured,

For Jesus is searching for you to heal you and strengthen you.
He is calling you by name and infusing you with his own life-blood.

Listen for the call of Christ the King, our Good Shepherd and follow him.

For with Jesus, and against all appearances, we will not perish, but have eternal life.

Christ the King rules from the cross and empty tomb.

He heals with the oil of salvation.

And he leads us to green pastures and still waters.

He does not need us to wear special t-shirts to find us

– he has marked us with his cross and given us the name:

Child of God, heir of salvation.

Follow the voice that speaks that name for you

– and no matter where else he might lead

– **you will end up risen from your grave to live in the eternal presence of God.**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen