

This does not, though, give His sheep a license to go out and sin and do whatever they want, and still be OK. If they do willfully sin, then it is a question if they were ever really His sheep to begin with. And Jesus speaks about this also in the parable of the wheat and tares. But St. Paul calls Jesus the Good Shepherd, the author and finisher of our faith.<sup>15</sup> So He that began a good work in you will bring it unto completion. He will preserve us, because it is His life in us, and we will be preserved and persevere until the end.

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April 22, 2012

<sup>1</sup> This sermon was originally written on the Gospel at Mass on the Second Sunday after Easter, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> *An Alternative Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised in 1928)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER, WITH THE ADDITIONS AND DEVIATIONS PROPOSED IN 1928 45 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xl (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxix (CIPBC 1963).

<sup>3</sup> Proverbs 8:1, 22-end (KJV).

<sup>4</sup> Proverbs 9:1-end (KJV).

<sup>5</sup> I *Maccabees* 3:1-26 (KJV).

<sup>6</sup> St. John 10:1-end (KJV).

<sup>7</sup> This personal name, characteristic of the Selucid dynasty, gave its name to one of the great cities of their empire, Antioch, where several hundred years later, the new followers of the God-man Jesus would first be called Christians.

<sup>8</sup> 2 *Maccabees* 10:1-4.

<sup>9</sup> Psalm 23:1 (KJV).

<sup>10</sup> Psalm 51:5 (KJV).

<sup>11</sup> St. John 10:29 (KJV).

<sup>12</sup> Ephesians 1:3-5 (KJV) (emphasis supplied).

<sup>13</sup> St. John 10:26.

<sup>14</sup> St. John 10:27.

<sup>15</sup> Hebrews 12:2.

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## SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER The Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Trinity<sup>1</sup>

### Lessons:<sup>2</sup>

**The First Lesson:** Here beginneth the eighth Chapter of the Proverbs.<sup>3</sup>

“Doth not wisdom cry? and understanding put forth her voice? ... The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth: While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth: When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep: When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth: Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men. Now therefore hearken unto me, O ye children: for blessed are they that keep my ways. Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not. Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the LORD. But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death.”

*Or,*

Here beginneth the ninth Chapter of the Proverbs.<sup>4</sup>

“Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars: She hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her

wine; she hath also furnished her table. She hath sent forth her maidens: she crieth upon the highest places of the city, Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith [SETH] to him, Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled. Forsake the foolish, and live; and go in the way of understanding. He that reproveth a scorner getteth to himself shame: and he that rebuketh a wicked man getteth himself a blot. Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding. For by me thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be increased. If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself: but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.

“A foolish woman is clamorous: she is simple, and knoweth nothing. For she sitteth at the door of her house, on a seat in the high places of the city, To call passengers who go right on their ways: Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: and as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith [SETH] to him, Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But he knoweth not that the dead are there; and that her guests are in the depths of hell.”

*Or,*

Here beginneth the third Chapter of the First Book of the Maccabees.<sup>5</sup>

“Then his son Judas, called Maccabeus, rose up in his stead. And all his brethren helped him, and so did all they that held with his father, and they fought with cheerfulness the battle of Israel. So he gat his people great honour, and put on a breastplate as a giant, and girt his warlike harness about him, and he made battles, protecting the host with his sword. In his acts he was like a lion, and like a lion’s whelp roaring for his prey. For He pursued the wicked, and sought them out, and burnt up those that vexed his people. Wherefore the wicked

for those who belong to Him. He says, “My sheep hear My voice.”

When we, as His sheep, hear Him, we respond. Because we have been purchased, we follow a new Shepherd or Master. We are sheep, or slaves, unto righteousness. And for those who have been purchased, when we hear our name called, because He knows us, we respond. We hear the voice of the Good Shepherd by the preaching of the Gospel. And when we hear our name called, we immediately know who it is that is calling out to us, and we respond by following.

The voice of Grace is irresistible. We no longer belong to Sin, We belong to God, because He purchased us. We do not belong to ourselves, we don’t own ourselves, but we follow the voice of the shepherd who owns us. And when the voice of truth is heard, there is a division which occurs, just like we see here in Chapter 10 of St. John’s Gospel. Some hear and believe, some don’t and try to stone. And Jesus says to those who try to stone Him, “You don’t believe, because you are not of my sheep.”<sup>13</sup>

If we belong to Him, then by His purchasing us on the Cross of Golgotha, we will respond to Him because we have no other choice. The benefit of belonging to His fold ism, as Jesus says, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of my hand.”<sup>14</sup>

For His sheep, He gives us eternal life, it is a gift. We do not earn eternal life. And since it is a gift, and we don’t deserve it anyway, if we do not earn it to begin with, we can never unearn it because Jesus said His sheep would never perish. This doesn’t mean that His sheep will not ever sin again, because we are still mere flesh, but being regenerate in heart, we will always draw close to the Good Shepherd as we hear His voice in keeping us.

That's amazing love, amazing grace. You did not earn it, you did not merit it, but through unconditional election He chose you. Grace is not given because you prayed a prayer, grace is not given because He knew in His infinite foreknowledge you would choose Him, Grace is given because He created you to be an object of His affection and favor. And because of our totally depraved state, we could not atone for our sin, nor would we, because sin is all we have ever known. Take the Hebrew children for example, while trekking through the wilderness after their exodus out of Egypt from their slavery under Pharaoh. Although they experienced the goodness of God's provision for them, they still yearned for their slavery because it was comfortable to them, because they were all born into slavery, and slavery was all they ever knew.

So the Good Shepherd, in His infinite mercy, came to lay down His life for His sheep. And just as the sheep of the Old Covenant were chosen by Him, so the sheep of the New Covenant are chosen as well. So, not all sheep belong to Him. He came to lay down His life for *His* sheep. This gives us a sense of a limited or a definite atonement. He didn't come to lay down His life for no sheep in particular. He didn't come to lay down His life for all sheep. But He came to lay down His life for *His* sheep, those whom the Father gave Him. If we say that He came to lay down His life for all sheep, than that would be double jeopardy, because there shouldn't be sheep in hell.

In Leviticus, the Father decreed that as the penalty of sin, the penitent would place his hand on the head of the sacrificial lamb, which was symbolic of there being a transfer of guilt. The lamb would then pay the penalty for the offeror's sin because without the shedding of blood there can be no remission of sin. So the Good Shepherd came and paid the price, paid the penalty, His own shed blood, which we should in all actuality have to pay ourselves, so that we could become the sheep of His fold, the object of His affection. And after the penalty and price for our sin has been paid, the Good Shepherd calls out by name

shrunk for fear of him, and all the workers of iniquity were troubled, because salvation prospered in his hand. He grieved also many kings, and made Jacob glad with his acts, and his memorial is blessed for ever. Moreover he went through the cities of Juda, destroying the ungodly out of them, and turning away wrath from Israel: So that he was renowned unto the utmost part of the earth, and he received unto him such as were ready to perish. Then Apollonius gathered the Gentiles together, and a great host out of Samaria, to fight against Israel. Which thing when Judas perceived, he went forth to meet him, and so he smote him, and slew him: many also fell down slain, but the rest fled. Wherefore Judas took their spoils, and Apollonius' sword also, and therewith he fought all his life long. Now when Seron, a prince of the army of Syria, heard say that Judas had gathered unto him a multitude and company of the faithful to go out with him to war; He said, I will get me a name and honour in the kingdom; for I will go fight with Judas and them that are with him, who despise the king's commandment. So he made him ready to go up, and there went with him a mighty host of the ungodly to help him, and to be avenged of the children of Israel. And when he came near to the going up of Bethhoron [**beth-HOE-rawn**], Judas went forth to meet him with a small company: Who, when they saw the host coming to meet them, said unto Judas, How shall we be able, being so few, to fight against so great a multitude and so strong, seeing we are ready to faint with fasting all this day? Unto whom Judas answered, It is no hard matter for many to be shut up in the hands of a few; and with the God of heaven it is all one, to deliver with a great multitude, or a small company: For the victory of battle standeth not in the multitude of an host; but strength cometh from heaven. They come against us in much pride and iniquity to destroy us, and our wives and children, and to spoil us: But we fight for our lives and our laws. Wherefore the Lord himself will overthrow them before our face: and as for you, be ye not afraid of them. Now as soon as he had left off speaking, he leapt suddenly upon them, and so Seron and his host was overthrown before him. And they pursued them from the going down of Bethhoron [**beth-HOE-rawn**] unto the plain,

where were slain about eight hundred men of them; and the residue fled into the land of the Philistines. Then began the fear of Judas and his brethren, and an exceeding great dread, to fall upon the nations round about them: Insomuch as his fame came unto the king, and all nations talked of the battles of Judas.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

**The Second Lesson:** Here beginneth the tenth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. John.<sup>6</sup>

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers. This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them. Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they

So there was a mistranslation from Greek to English. The authors of the New Testament placed “doulos” there strategically, instead of “ypí□réti□s” which means servant, because of the Scriptural truth that our free will is limited, and that we are either under bondage to sin, or under bondage to righteousness. Jesus said here that we are sheep. Sheep are owned and do not own themselves. A sheep’s will is enslaved to the shepherd. So until the sheep hear the Good Shepherd’s voice through the proclamation of the Gospel, they are submissive to the keeper of the sheep, which is the not-so-good shepherd, Satan.

We were all a part of that sheepfold, submissive to the will of Satan and sin. And according to the Psalmist, “we were conceived in sin from our mother’s womb.”<sup>10</sup> Since the wages of sin are death, or separation from God, we were born totally depraved, unable to make an eternal choice on our own, because we were enslaved and under bondage to sin. But Jesus also exclaimed that He came to lay down His life for His sheep.

Preparing for today’s sermon, I read an article that asked, “Where did Jesus get his sheep?” In St. John’s Gospel,<sup>11</sup> Jesus says that His Father has given Him His sheep. But if all sheep belong to another shepherd, what sheep does His Father have to give Him? The answer is, not all sheep are with their original owner, but through original sin, the sin of Adam and Eve, the first sheep ever made, through their now depraved state, became enslaved to the serpent and his will.

St. Paul states that, “Just as He (meaning God) chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in LOVE, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Christ Jesus to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.”<sup>12</sup> Thus some sheep were created, still utterly depraved, who cannot choose Him by their own free will because they are under bondage to sin, but yet before the foundation of the world He chose them. God loved you even before you were ever created.

When we read the rest of St. John's Chapter 10, we see that Jesus' description of Himself as the Good Shepherd referred His listeners to the familiar Psalm that says, "The Lord is my Shepherd." So they immediately understood Jesus was referring to Himself as Lord--and that brought division among the crowd. There were those who believed and those who didn't, just like we see today. When the Word of Truth is proclaimed today there is an immediate division between those who believe on Jesus as Christ, and those who don't, and later we will get to Jesus' explanation as to why.

Those who didn't believe in Jesus accused Him of blasphemy, they later even picked up stones to kill Him, but of course Jesus slipped through the crowd because His time had not yet come to lay down and pick up His own life. No one could kill Him until He willingly laid down His life, since no human could take it from Him without His consent.

But getting to the meat of our lection, and the entirety of St. John, Chapter 10, as I said before, Jesus explains in great detail the Doctrines of Grace. Within this discourse, He uses a shepherd-sheep metaphor to explain humanity's relationships to God and to sin. This also coincides with His many parables that use the image of a master-slave relationship.

Sometimes in reading His parables or in the writings of the Apostles, we don't get the complete sense of First Century slavery because of a mistranslation of the Greek word "doulos" into English. "Doulos" has no other meaning except for slave, or one whose will is submissive to his master. And the only time you see the translators use the word slave for "doulos" is when they could not get around the fact that Paul was directly speaking to slaves concerning slavery. Out of the one hundred twenty-four times "doulos" is used in the New Testament, the majority of those are translated into English as "servant" or "bond-servant".

shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.

"There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings. And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him? Others said, These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?

"And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter. And Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon's porch. Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one. Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shewed [SHOWD] you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me? The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God. Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God? If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him. Therefore they sought again to take him: but he escaped out of their hand, And went away again beyond Jordan into the place where John at first baptized; and

there he abode. And many resorted unto him, and said, John did no miracle: but all things that John spake of this man were true. And many believed on him there.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

**Homily:**

**Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.**

Our Second Lesson this morning is a Gospel where Christ explains in great detail the love of the Triune Godhead. How He explains this love, during this Good Shepherd discourse, provides us with the means of understanding concerning the extent of His Love, and also the benefits of His love. If we truly listen to the words of Christ concerning the doctrines and means of Grace, then those questions that for centuries have separated Christians could finally dissipate, and we could begin worshipping our All Holy and Sovereign God together again, without needing to choose sides concerning these doctrines.

Those few things that one must believe while professing Christ as Lord remain unquestioned between the two sides, *i.e.* the Virgin Birth; the atoning, vicarious death of Jesus upon the Cross; His Resurrection; His Ascension; His Second Coming; that Scripture containeth all things necessary to Salvation; and that Scripture is the Authority that Governs both the believer and the Church through the witness of Sacred Tradition, by which the Church interprets Scripture. These are the key elements which make us one family.

Christians differ in their definitions of how Christ brings us into the life of Faith, but this shows that these differences are an in-house debate. Why? Because unbelievers do not write theological dissertations on their positions on grace. First, they have no concept of Grace and, second, that Grace is not neces-

sary for them to fulfill the self-satisfaction of their rebellious, inherited sinful, fallen nature.

There are doctrines which divide Christians legitimately, and there are doctrines which need not to divide us. But getting back to our Second Lesson this morning, Jesus, on the Feast of Dedication, exclaims that He is the Good Shepherd. Now it is important to note that it was on a particular feast day that Christ made this astounding proclamation. When this Chapter appears in some of our Mass and Morning Prayer lections, those stop at Verses 16 or 18, when we don't really get the full context of this statement.

It is in Chapter 10, Verse 22 that John's Gospel tells us this was on the Feast of Dedication was a celebration of the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem after it had been desecrated in 167 BC by the Seleucid [SEH-loo-sid] King Antiochus<sup>7</sup> IV Epiphanes [ann-TIE-uh-cuss the Fourth ee-PIFF-uh-knees]. The Seleucid [SEH-loo-sid] Empire was birthed out of the eastern conquests of Alexander the Great. And on approximately December 15, 164 BC, during the Maccabean revolt against the Seleucids [SEH-loo-sidz], Judas Maccabeus restored the Temple to Jewish worship and the Temple was purified from all the fabricated pagan idols and altars that the Syro-Macedonians had placed in it.<sup>8</sup> We know this feast as the Festival of Lights, or Hanukkah.

During this festival, Judas was acclaimed as one of the greatest warriors in the history of the Hebrew nation, but they also celebrated other great warriors, some of whom also began as humble shepherds, such as Joshua, David, and Gideon. When Jesus exclaimed that He was the Good Shepherd, He was saying He was unlike those other shepherds who would take the life of others to restore the political kingdom. Instead, He would give His own life to restore or establish His heavenly Kingdom, and it would remain for all eternity His.