

Pastor Joe Polzin
John 10:14-28
“Call His Name... Shepherd”
Year B – Advent Midweek 2
December 13, 2017

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Imagine, picture in your mind, an image of authority. What comes to mind? A commander in the armed forces, perhaps? A mayor or governor? A police officer? Maybe teachers or parents? There could be many things.

One image that I bet didn't come up for many of you is the image of a little baby. We don't usually associate newborn infants with some who's in authority. They don't have decision-making capabilities. They don't run schools or businesses or military posts. Still, ask any parents of little ones, myself included, and we'll admit that children do have enough authority to keep their parents jumping. They're very good at making adults do some pretty incredible things at a moment's notice. Besides that, though, a baby is still not someone's traditional image of authority.

Well, all through Advent and Christmas, we are surrounded by images of the Child of Bethlehem. We sing about him in our hymns and carols. We decorate our homes and churches with figures of the holy family in the Bethlehem stable. We see that helpless newborn infant wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. But do we consider him a person of authority?

We may imagine that his infant authority goes no further than that of any other baby; he has the ability to command his parents to satisfy his newly acquired earthly needs. And we even know from Scripture, like we heard last week in Philippians, that this Child, the Son of God, “emptied himself, taking the form of a servant” (2:7) when he came to us. He laid aside his divine majesty to be born among us and to live as a humble servant. He came, as he himself said, not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). So what authority does a servant have?

It was for the purpose of that ransom payment that this little Child, born in Bethlehem, born to serve, was given authority. He received the authority of a servant Shepherd over his flock. His ancestor, the great King David, was himself a shepherd, *and* from the same town of Bethlehem.

It was significant, then, when God's people heard the prophecy from Micah, which are words addressed directly to Bethlehem, saying that the Messiah would come from them. A ruler for Israel would be born, who will bring rest and peace, and who will “stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall dwell secure...” (5:4) This Messiah, this Shepherd would be authorized, have the authority, to care for the flock of God's people.

The Messiah, the Shepherd, is, of course, our Lord Jesus Christ. I wonder if that prophecy of the Shepherd from Micah was flashing in anyone's minds as Jesus stood up in John chapter 10 and said “I am the good shepherd.” Surely they knew what town he was from and what ancestry he had. Unfortunately, I think many of them missed it, including his disciples. At least, at first. But Jesus couldn't have been more clear.

“I am the good shepherd,” he says. “I know my own and my own know me, just as the

Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.... For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may 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 I have *authority* to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father” (John 10:14-15, 17-18).

Jesus makes it clear, he has the authority to lay down his life to save his flock because he, and he alone, has the charge from God the Father to do so. This is the authority of the Good Shepherd who lays his life on the line for the sake of his sheep. And by doing so, this Shepherd leads his flock, his redeemed people—you and me—safely through the valley of the shadow of death. He can navigate that dark valley in safety because he himself has already passed through it and has emerged triumphant on the other side. Death could not keep the Shepherd in that valley, and it will not keep his flock, either.

This is why our Savior, our Shepherd, was born. This is why he came. His Father gave him a mission to accomplish and the *authority* to accomplish it. He was given the authority to lay down his life on the cross as the perfect servant, and the authority to take up his life again, leaving behind the empty tomb and its dark shadows of death forever.

Jesus died to pay the debt we owed, the penalty of death that we earned for ourselves. Like the sheep we are, we wander. We know God’s Word and His will for us, but we turn away from Him constantly. Instead of following our Shepherd, we follow our own sinful desires and listen to the temptations of the world around us.

But Jesus our Shepherd came to do what good shepherds always do, “to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). Jesus gathers us to himself. He forgives us our sins, having paid our debt with his own life. He anoints us and claims us as his own in the water and Word of Baptism. He feeds us with his body and blood in his holy Supper. Now filled with the Holy Spirit, we follow our Shepherd throughout our lives, until we dwell securely and at peace with him forever.

Our Epistle Reading this evening gives us a glimpse into that eternal home, where we, with all of the redeemed, stand before the throne of God and the Lamb. And this is the beauty of Scripture, because what we see prophesied in the Old Testament, in this case regarding a Shepherd Messiah in Micah, we see fulfilled in Christ, and then promised and fully revealed when Christ comes again. Revelation 7 shows us that future reality.

We will have a place among that countless multitude, people from every nation, who have come out of the great tribulation, led in safety by their Shepherd. We will stand before his throne, our sins washed away in the blood of the Lamb who is, and has always been, our Shepherd. We will pasture in safety and drink from the springs of living water. We will have no hunger or thirst or pain in any way. And God Himself will wipe away every tear from our eyes.

That scene we have in our minds of the little Christ Child born in Bethlehem is peaceful, and idyllic. But let us never forget, that Child came for a reason. Our Savior Jesus came with the authority as the Good Shepherd to confront, pay for, and destroy our sins, and to lead us through sin and death to a future with him, where we will experience extraordinary and eternal peace. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

And now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord.