

Sermon for April 19th, 2026
THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

READINGS

Ezekiel 34:1-16

1 The word of the LORD came to me: **2** “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? **3** You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. **4** The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. **5** So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; **6** they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them.

7 “Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: **8** As I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep, **9** therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: **10** Thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them.

11 “For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. **12** As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. **13** And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. **14** I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. **15** I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. **16** I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice.

Psalm 23

1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.

3 He restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.

4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

5 You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
forever.

1 Peter 2:18-25

18 Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. 19 For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. 20 For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. 21 For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. 22 He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. 23 When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. 24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. 25 For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

John 10:7-16

7 So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. 9 I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. 11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

Our meditation for this Third Sunday in Easter is on our Old Testament and Gospel readings.

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

One Shepherd

The reading from Ezekiel is easy enough to understand. God speaks to the prophet, condemning the religious leaders of Judah in his day. He refers to them as "shepherds," while the laypeople of Judah are the "sheep." The priests and Levites and Ezekiel's contemporary prophets were *supposed* to lead the people, teaching them about God's Law and the promise of the Messiah. The priests were *supposed* to ensure the spiritual well-being of the people with right sacrifices and help with the cleanliness of the population. They were *supposed* to worship only the true God and condemn pagan practices. They hardly did any of these things. In fact, earlier in his book Ezekiel details the crass idolatry, sun-worship,

and conspiratorial corruption that were happening in the Jerusalem Temple itself.¹ God also speaks of how there were false prophets in those days running around and telling people lies and using black magic to manipulate their way into wealth.² Suffice it to say that all of Judah's spiritual leadership was incredibly corrupt, and that is not even scratching the surface regarding the wicked kings who were reigning at the time.

So it was no different from when Christ walked the earth or today's religious and political environment.

So how in our reading does our Lord respond to these dour conditions? He tells these evil shepherds that He will take their power away and be a Shepherd to the people Himself. If these men shall destroy the people of God with their endless oppressions and apostasies, then it is clear that mere sinful men *cannot* be trusted to lead His people by their own authority. When this prophecy is fulfilled, He declares, there will be no sacerdotal order. Christ affirms it by saying “So there will be one flock, one shepherd.” There will be no Pope, there will be no metropolitan, there will be no archbishop. There will be ministers, certainly, but they will *not* be the go-between authorities mediating between God and men; they will be there to assist the people with a leadership by example rather than dominion.³

In our Gospel reading for today, Christ says “I am the Good Shepherd.” This is to say, Jesus fulfills the prophecy that Ezekiel relates to us. Jesus, the Second Person of the Godhead, gathers together all who receive the Gospel into the invisible Church. Jesus, the true and good Shepherd, fulfills the Old Covenant and renders it entirely obsolete so that there will be no more priestly oppression. Jesus sought the lost sheep of the house of Israel and all others around the world, dying for everyone's sins so that by all means some may be saved. Jesus binds up the wounds of men by promising us eternal life through faith in Him, Jesus is the One who sent the Holy Spirit to strengthen us and seal us for salvation, and Jesus is the great Judge of men who will upbraid all the powers of the world. There is no other shepherd. Anyone who claims to lead the entire Church in Christ's place then is antichrist.

Against False Shepherds

My friends, do not be fooled. This isn't just about the papacy. Let no man with a clerical collar on his neck trick you into letting him boss you around – not even me. Let no man take away your freedom in Christ, or make you think that you have to submit all of your opinions and activities to him for approval. He might tell you that he has “apostolic succession,” and by that he means that a silly conga line of men for two thousand years laid their hands on each other's shoulders until he ended up getting hands laid on him. He might tell you that he went to a very important Seminary and he knows so much more than you and he did all this work to be ordained but this doesn't count for the pastors who say the opposite of what he says even though they went to the same seminary and *blah blah blah blah blah*. He might even tell you that unless you change all of your political and musical/entertainment and historical opinions to match his then you are *damned*, hellbound for the “travesty” of disagreeing with him about things that don't have much to do with Scripture. He might even insult you, call you “depraved,” or tell other people to bully you. He might even write up a “declaration” with his buddies to condemn you. But you must not submit no matter what manipulative tripe he spews out of his mouth, for he is not your shepherd – Christ is.

One can only imagine the horrific faces such men (and the women pretending to be pastors) will make on Judgment Day, especially in light of their hypocrisies. Rome tells people to pay indulgences and warns against greed; Pope Benedict IX sold his office to the highest bidder – *twice* – abandoning his ministry to seek worldly power but demanding that people submit to his every whim.⁴ The current

1 Ezekiel 8

2 Ezekiel 13

3 1 Peter 5:1-3

4 <https://www.historyskills.com/classroom/ancient-history/worst-popes/>

and previous popes have moralized to the Catholic laity that they cannot support borders or armed forces while enjoying the protection of the Swiss Guard. Orthodoxy fares no better: the “Protopresbyter” Robert Kondratick of the Orthodox Church of America (OCA) was dismissed after running a 20 year blackmail and extortion operation in his own church body, where it turned out that plenty of priests were engaged in infidelity, embezzlement and drug addiction.⁵ Imagine that, dozens of clergy telling you that you cannot sleep with your wife more than once a month all engaged in sexual sin! And when it comes to Lutherans...let's just say there are some discouraging lists out there,⁶ to say nothing of the improprieties in other Protestant branches. It is absolutely everywhere, and I could go on but other people have cataloged them all over books and the internet.⁷ The ones I have brought up are just a drop in the ocean of pastoral sins over the past two thousand years.

Why bring all these scandals up? Aren't we all sinners, even those in spiritual authority? We absolutely are. But it is patently absurd to give up your freedom to institutions that are riddled with corruption, abuse, hypocrisy and scandal. These ministers play the part of the wicked shepherds of Judah's past, telling people what they can or can't eat, when they can eat, how to drive their cars,⁸ what jobs they can have, who they can or can't vote for, what politics they can espouse, who they associate with, and a whole *host* of other matters which they want to force on us all but are not found in Scripture. The entire time they are enforcing the traditions of men, they flaunt these traditions privately. Men with real sins condemning others for doing things and thinking things that aren't sin.

They are just like the Pharisees, about whom Christ says “they tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger.”⁹ Now is the time to rejoice in Christ my friends, because back then the people still had to listen to the Pharisees – He says “the scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, so do whatever they tell you,”¹⁰ but *now* Christ Himself is the sole Shepherd over our souls. If any pope, pastor, theologian or whoever tells you to do or believe this or that by his own authority, you can laugh in that man's face and walk away.

True Pastoral Leadership

Someone may reply to me that the Bible tells us to submit to the pastors, the bishops, and elders. After all, the author of Hebrews tells us “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”¹¹ This is correct! But it would be absurd if by that verse he meant that you have to change the oil on your pastor's car when he tells you to, or sell all your possessions so that he can live in luxury. When they tell us to respect and support spiritual authorities, the Scriptures mean that we follow those clergy insofar as they speak and properly apply the Word of God. A minister is in the right to rebuke someone in his congregation if they stole something, for the Word declares “you shall not steal.” He is right to pass along the Biblical command to be charitable, or to exhort you to faith in Christ, etc. But a minister cannot command a woman to marry him, he cannot command people to sin, and he cannot tell people to change their opinions when

5 <https://web.archive.org/web/20090225043830/http://www.oca.org/PDF/SIC/2008-1108-1-sicreport-final.pdf>

6 <https://web.archive.org/web/20260217044259/https://www.lcmschildren.org/lcms-sexual-abuses-history>
<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/over-2000-people-abused-german-protestant-church-study-2024-01-25/>

7 <https://www.ranker.com/list/pastors-that-fell-from-grace/genevieve-carlton>
[for just a few more examples]

8 “Those incur grave guilt who, by drunkenness or a love of speed, endanger their own and others' safety on the road, at sea, or in the air.” Catholic Catechism, 2290. While this is fine in terms of the principle of helping our neighbors stay safe, a strict reading would ban all racing sports.

9 Matthew 23:4
10 Matthew 23:2
11 Hebrews 13:17

there is no sin in them. Nor can he command matters of private devotion like fasting or night vigils or praying the hours; you have freedom in Christ to engage with such things as *you* see fit to benefit your sanctification, with prompting and guidance from the Holy Spirit.

A true minister, a *legitimate* clergyman, teaches and applies the Word alone. If he is worth his salt, then if something about you offends his sensibilities he will go straight to the Word and determine whether his objection is founded in his opinion or if there is real sin in you. I am not speaking about open and crass sin of course, for such *would* be a cause for him to exhort you to repentance, and upon impenitence he must bring it to the congregation. Otherwise, he *must* submit himself to the Word.

Example; if a man likes to do boxing, his pastor may find that objectionable. The minister thinks that boxing is a perverse enjoyment of violence and conflict, and he believes this goes against the general call for Christians to be peaceful people.¹² If he were a wicked clergyman, he would simply threaten the man with being banned from the Eucharist or excommunication so long as he kept going to boxing class. But a *good* minister asks the man about it, and finds out whether he is boxing from a sinful love of violence or if he merely enjoys the sport and culture. If there is some sin there, then he attempts to work *with* the man to temper that instinct toward sin and seeks to help him make his hobby *unsinful* if possible. That is what a good pastor does, and tragically such discussions are few and far between.

Conclusion

The Church has tons of people who wish to take their faith seriously. They are sheep who yearn for the true Shepherd, Jesus Christ, who personally offers to guide them through all life by Word and Sacrament. The pastors and other Church authorities are *supposed* to assist such Christians, working as “undershepherds” who serve the laity and advance the cause of the Gospel. But the devil knows this, and so to mess things up he fills the offices of the Church with false shepherds who will route that serious faith to unproductive ends. My friend, how can you tell the difference between the loyal servant and the wicked shepherd? We already know that we must avoid anyone teaching false doctrine, but there *are* bad pastors and authorities who only speak correct doctrine. For the good servants, this discernment takes time and listening to their words. But for the bad ones, it is painfully easy to discern even if they are not teaching errors: once you see them making unbiblical demands, you'll know to who you can avoid.

This may sound burdensome, but the thing is my friends, the point of what I am saying is the opposite. You and I have one (1) Shepherd, our Lord Jesus Christ. One day He shall return and free us all from even having to *listen* to those who would pretend to be shepherds in His place. But for now, He calls us to be independent Christians who hear the voice of our Shepherd above and beyond what any “hired hand” says. From Calvary onward, you are free from anyone who would make you their spiritual slaves, whether that is the devil or one of his minions behind the pulpits. Let us therefore rejoice in this freedom, carefully maintaining it according to the Law of Liberty.¹³

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

12 Romans 12:18

13 James 1:25