

## Sermon followed by Service

April 22, 2023

Ezekiel 34

They don't just stand and watch; they don't just hope and pray; they don't just settle for easy-pickings. Who am I talking about? The United States Coast Guard. I remember the news - on one day a fishing trawler goes down off Alaska; a Coast Guard plane drops a life raft and then doesn't just hope and wait, a Coast Guard helicopter follows up and pulls the men out of the water. That same day an oil drilling rig in the Gulf of Mexico explodes; it wasn't long and the Coast Guard was there picking up survivors. They didn't just rescue the easy-pickings; over the next 4 days they kept searching, going over 1,900-square-miles of water, 12 times by air and 5 times by boat. If there were any survivors left, the Coast Guard was determined to find them. They don't just stand and watch; they don't just hope and pray; they don't just settle for easy pickings.

In our lesson we hear that same determination. Our Lord says: **“I will search for my sheep and look after them. I will rescue them ... I will bring them out of the nations ... and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them... I myself will tend my sheep. I will search for the lost and will bring back the strays.”** Out there in the world, in here in our church, in our families, and among our neighbors our God sees people lost and straying. He sees people doomed to drown in a world gone wrong; he sees people doomed to burn forever. He knows how they have pushed him away. He knows all the excuses for not bothering with them. But he's not ready to call off his search. He's determined - **“I will search for the lost and will bring back the strays.”**

Like Jesus in the parable of the lost sheep. In that parable a shepherd had a hundred sheep. But one of them got lost. Only one of them was lost. He still had his ninety-nine sheep. Ninety-nine out of a hundred. We might think that pretty good. But not Jesus. He wanted all of his sheep. He couldn't bear losing any. He had to seek and save the lost. So to the short, hated tax collector Zacchaeus, Jesus said, **"I must stay at your house."** It didn't matter what other people thought of Jesus talking to Zacchaeus. Jesus had come to seek and to save what was lost and that's what Jesus was determined to do.

Why? Why was Jesus so determined, so driven to seek the lost? Jesus sees the lost as they are. He sees them as lost sheep. Scattered. Without protection from a shepherd. As good as dead. In fact in the Hebrew the word for lost also means "ruined, destroyed, as good as dead." Lost sheep are ruined sheep, dead sheep. So what does it mean to be lost? Lost doesn't mean traveling to heaven in less than first class. Lost doesn't mean getting into heaven by the back door or by the skin of our teeth. Lost means cursed forever in hell - no life, no love, no peace, forever. Jesus saw what the lost had coming, so he had compassion on them, because he saw them as they were - lost.

Who are the lost? We might think of the lost as the worst of the worst. But lost might be the check-out lady at the grocery store, always helpful, always smiling, who always says "thank you" and "have a nice day." Lost might be your neighbor who is always willing to give a helping hand. Lost because they think that as long as they're honest and kind, as long as they work hard and live good, then they've got their place in heaven. They need someone to tell them the bad news - that being nice, that clean living isn't God's standard for rightness, for heaven; that being nice and clean living doesn't and can't make up for even our smallest sin; that sin, their sin damns.

Do you know someone who needs to hear that bad news? Or someone thinking he's fine without Jesus or someone thinking that as long as she thinks nice things about Jesus she can keep him off to the side of her life? Who is that someone? In your family? Among your Facebook friends?

Or do you know someone lost and drowning in her guilt, someone lost and drowning thinking he has to do it all? Whom do you know who needs to hear God's good news? That Jesus' blood - the blood he shed on the cross - has washed the filth of our sin away, that Jesus' clean living has replaced our filth and covered us holy, that his death gets to take the place of our death, that in the blood of Jesus we are clean and right by God? So that even in the valley of the shadow of death we don't need to be afraid. That no matter who or what is against us our Good Shepherd will take care. Do you need to hear that for yourself? Let it sink in. Do you know someone else, anyone else, who needs to hear it?

In his determination to reach the lost, Jesus will use you and me to reach out to those lost. We might wish the Lord would use somebody else. Somebody who knows more, who talks better. Someone with a quicker mind and quicker answers. God doesn't always use the quick mind and quick tongue. In the Old Testament he used Balaam's donkey. He used a Moses who said he was slow of speech and tongue. He used a little servant girl, a prisoner and slave, to point the leper Naaman to her God. God didn't always use the smartest people, the best speaking people; he didn't always use the most confident people, the most outgoing people. Instead God used his special chosen people.

Today God still uses his special chosen people to reach out to the lost. We might not feel specially chosen. We don't get special visions and calls in the night. But **“you are [God's] chosen people, [his] royal priesthood, [his] holy nation, [his] people ... that you may declare the praises of his who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”** Instead of being sheepish about reaching out to the lost, you get to know that God has specially chosen you and called you to reach out to the lost and show them the way to life.

We get to search with Jesus. Looking at the lost and what they say and do ... looking at ourselves, our hurts and our fears, we might not be too interested in that call. We might be more interested in a search and destroy mission, or a sit back and let someone else do it mission. But look at the determination in Jesus' heart. Jesus doesn't have the determination of a detective looking for the guilty to condemn the guilty. Jesus doesn't have the determination of revenge looking to get even. Jesus doesn't have the determination of the hired shepherd who doesn't care for the sheep; but Jesus has the protecting and searching determination of the Good Shepherd who sacrificed his own life for the good of the sheep.

When we look at the lost, we might not have that kind of love. We might think: “Thank God he doesn't call us to sacrifice our lives.” But he does, doesn't he? **“In view of God's mercy offer yourselves as living sacrifices.”** And what did Jesus say? **“If anyone would come after me he must deny himself.”** In view of Jesus' determination to seek and save us, we sacrifice ourselves, we deny ourselves; we deny our pride, our fears, our hurts, and all our other excuses for not seeking the lost. We look to Christ and his cross. We look at the lost and where they are going - where we would be going

if someone didn't reach out to us. And we take our place on our Shepherd's search and rescue team - **"I WILL SEEK OUT THE LOST AND BRING BACK THE STRAYS."** Amen.

April 22 & 23, 2023

## DIVINE SERVICE II

**IN OUR WORLD TODAY ...** not only are we surrounded by wandering and confused people finding their way into trouble, but we have inside ourselves wandering, confused hearts looking for trouble.

**IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ...** we see our Good Shepherd at work to shepherd us from trouble to blessing.

### OPENING HYMN

*"The King of Love My Shepherd Is"*

**Hymn 552**

The King of love my shepherd is, whose goodness fails me never;  
I nothing lack if I am his, and he is mine forever.

Where streams of living water flow, my Savior gently leads me,  
and where the verdant pastures grow, with food celestial feeds me.

Perverse and foolish oft I strayed, but yet in love he sought me  
and on his shoulder gently laid and home, rejoicing, brought me.

In death's dark vale I fear no ill with you, dear Lord, beside me,  
your rod and staff my comfort still, your cross before to guide me.

You spread a table in my sight, a banquet here bestowing;  
your oil of welcome, my delight; my cup is overflowing!

And so through all the length of days your goodness fails me never;  
Good Shepherd, may I sing your praise within your house forever!

### INVOCATION

M: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: **Amen.**

## CONFESSION

M: Dear friends, let us approach God with a true heart and confess our sins, asking him in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to forgive us.

**C: Lord of life, I confess that I am by nature dead in sin.  
For faithless worrying and selfish pride,  
For sins of habit and sins of choice,  
For the evil I have done and the good I have failed to do,  
I deserve to be cast away from your presence forever.  
O Lord, I am sorry for my sins. Forgive me, for Jesus' sake.**

## ABSOLUTION

M: Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. In his great mercy, God made us alive in Christ even when we were dead in our sins. Hear the word of Christ through his called servant: I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

**C: Amen.**

## LORD, HAVE MERCY (*Kyrie*)

M: In peace, let us pray to the Lord.

For the well-being of all people everywhere, that they may receive from you all they need to sustain body and life, hear our prayer, O Lord.

**C: Lord, have mercy.**

M: For the spread of your life-giving gospel throughout the world, that all who are lost in sin may be brought to faith in you, hear our prayer, O Christ.

**C: Christ, have mercy.**

M: For patience and perseverance in this life, that we may not lose the hope of heaven as we await your return, hear our prayer, O Lord.

**C: Lord, have mercy.**

M: Lord of life, live in us that we may live for you.

**C: Amen.**

## PRAYER OF THE DAY

O Lord Jesus Christ, you are the Good Shepherd who laid down your life for the sheep. Lead us now to the still waters of your life-giving Word that we may abide in your Father's house forevermore; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Amen.**

## CHOIR

*"Rest" by Matt Maher*

*Oh my Lord, You are my shepherd and I shall not want  
Oh my Lord, beside still waters You repair my heart  
I trust in You, oh I trust in You*

### **Refrain**

*Even though I walk through the valley of death  
You restore my soul and You give me rest  
All the memories of Your faithfulness  
You restore my soul and You give me rest  
You restore my soul and You give me rest You give me rest*

*Oh my Lord, You prepare a table for You and me  
Oh my Lord, in the middle of a fight with my enemies  
I trust in You, Oh I trust in You*

### **Refrain**

*I will fear no evil for You're here with me  
Your goodness and Your love, they will never leave  
Just a closer walk with Thee, just a closer walk*

### **Refrain**

## FIRST READING

*Ezekiel 34:11–16*

“For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness.



I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.

The Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

**CHOIR**

*“The Lord Is My Shepherd”*

*The Lord is my Shepherd He meets all my needs,  
To a restful oasis He tenderly leads;  
My soul He restores, and the right path I take,  
He abundantly blesses for His own name’s sake.*

*He leads through the valley of death’s darkest gloom,  
But because He’s beside me I shall not fear doom;  
His rod and His staff my security,  
He guides and protects me devotedly.*

*The one perfect host, He graciously cares  
While my foes are restrained, a feast He prepares;  
The Lord fills my cup with His own rarest wine,  
And anoints me with perfume as I come and dine.*

*Pursued by prosperity all my life long,  
His unfailing kindness will be my sweet song;  
And in my Lord’s mansions forever I’ll be,  
With fullness of joy for eternity.*

**SECOND READING***1 Peter 2:19–25*

For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

“He committed no sin,  
and no deceit was found in his mouth.”

When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. “He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.” For “you were like sheep going astray,” but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

The Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION***John 10:14*

Alleluia. I am the good shepherd;  
I know my sheep and my sheep know me. Alleluia.

**GOSPEL***John 10:11–18*

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— just as the Father knows me and I know the Father— and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.

The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to 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 authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

**Praise be to you, O Christ!**

**PSALM 23 (KJV)**

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

**He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:  
he leadeth me beside the still waters.**

**He restoreth my soul:  
he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.**

**Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil:  
for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.**

**Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:  
thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.**

**Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:  
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.**

**HYMN OF THE DAY**

*“The Lord’s My Shepherd”*

**Hymn 553**

The Lord’s my shepherd; I’ll not want. He makes me down to lie  
in pastures green; he leadeth me the quiet waters by.  
He leadeth me, he leadeth me the quiet waters by.

My soul he doth restore again and me to walk doth make  
within the paths of righteousness, e’en for his own name’s sake;  
within the paths of righteousness, e’en for his own name’s sake.

Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale, yet will I fear no ill;  
for thou art with me, and thy rod and staff me comfort still;  
for thou art with me, and thy rod and staff me comfort still.

My table thou hast furnished in presence of my foes;  
my head thou dost with oil anoint, and my cup overflows.  
My head thou dost with oil anoint, and my cup overflows.

Goodness and mercy all my life shall surely follow me,  
and in God's house forevermore my dwelling place shall be;  
and in God's house forevermore my dwelling place shall be.

## SERMON

## HYMN

*"Jesus Sinners Does Receive"*

**Hymn 654 vs. 1, 3, & 4**

Jesus sinners does receive; oh, may all this saying ponder  
who in sin's delusions live and from God and heaven wander.  
Here is hope for all who grieve: Jesus sinners does receive.

Sheep that from the fold did stray are not by the Lord forsaken;  
weary souls who lost their way are by Christ, the Shepherd, taken  
in his arms that they may live: Jesus sinners does receive.  
I, a sinner, come to you with a penitent confession.  
Savior, show me mercy, too; grant for all my sins remission.  
Let these words my soul relieve: Jesus sinners does receive.

## PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

*Brief intercessory prayers may be added in a fitting place.*

Loving Shepherd of the sheep, fill us with contentment and confidence during this season as we celebrate your Easter victory. You laid down your life for the sheep and then rose again to assure us that you give us eternal life.

**Good Shepherd, save us.**

Strengthen our faith to follow where you lead, to the green pastures of your Word, the quiet waters of our baptism, and the gracious table of your body and blood where our cup overflows with your forgiving love. Guide us to find in you the gate that leads to safety and good pastures.

**Good Shepherd, lead us.**

Guard and protect us from those who want to lead us astray and snatch us out of your hand. Give us courage to fight against the devil and wisdom to recognize false teachers. Lead us to honor and follow those you have called to shepherd your flock, the Church.

**Good Shepherd, guide us.**

Let your rod and your staff comfort us and all your sheep in times of sickness and sadness and especially when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. [We include in our prayers today... *here name the person and the cause of the petition.*] May we find in your redemption and your Father's resolve the unbreakable promise that we will dwell in your house forever.

**Good Shepherd, console us.**

Move us to reach out to sheep who are not yet a part of our sheep pen but whom you have claimed as your own. Give us your passion to search for the sheep who are lost and lead us to rejoice when they have been found.

**Good Shepherd, inspire us.**

Hear us, Lord, as we pray in silence.

*Silent prayer*

We thank you for all the blessings we have gained from your goodness: family and friends, wealth and health, work and leisure. Give us wisdom to long for and cherish your more precious gifts, your Word and sacraments, so that your goodness and love may follow us all the days of our life.  
**Good Shepherd, hear us. Amen.**

**PRAYER AND LORD'S PRAYER**

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.**

**BLESSING**

M: The Lord bless you and keep you.  
The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.  
The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace. **Amen.**

**CLOSING HYMN**

*"I Am Jesus' Little Lamb"*  
**Hymn 804**

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 ev'ry day the same, even calls me by my name.

Day by day, at home, away, Jesus is my staff and stay.  
When I hunger, Jesus feeds me, into pleasant pastures leads me;  
when I thirst, he bids me go where the quiet waters flow.

Who so happy as I am, even now the Shepherd's lamb?  
And when my short life is ended, by his angel host attended,  
he shall fold me to his breast, there within his arms to rest.

## OFFERING

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## EASTER GUARDS – YOU WERE NOTICED!

Dear St. John's Lutheran Church Family,

I want to thank you for the beautiful Christian example you are to Libertyville and neighboring communities every Easter.

It has always been a tradition for my children, grandchildren, and me to drive by your church as part of our Easter experience.

Libertyville was my home for many years until moving out to Saddlebrook Farms where I have now lived for twenty-seven years.

I attend the Libertyville Covenant Church so often drive by your church.

This year as I drove to and from Good Friday Service, I needed to once again see the tomb and impressive guards guarding the stone ... Then again Sunday morning to see the beautiful moving picture of the stone rolled away... the tomb was empty ... and no guards. Praise God!

Thank you and may God bless you in all you do for our community.

In Christ,  
K. Anderson

## Moving forward in Vietnam

In 2011, leadership from the Hmong Fellowship Church (HFC), a church body in Vietnam numbering more than 140,000 members, invited Rev. Bounkeo Lor, a WELS pastor in Kansas City, to train their church leaders in the truth of the Scriptures. They desired not only to be trained in the Scriptures but also to know thoroughly Lutheran doctrine and practice. Regular theological training of dozens of HFC pastors began. In 2018, WELS was invited by the Vietnamese government and the HFC to build a theological education center near the capital city of Hanoi. While the COVID pandemic and other hurdles delayed initial plans, we're thankful that God has now made it possible for us to move forward.

The new Theological Education Center was completed and passed inspection at the end of January 2023. WELS took full ownership of the building at that time. The new center includes a chapel, classrooms, and dormitory/cafeteria space for up to 60 visiting students at a time. A formal building dedication and graduation ceremony for the first class of 57 pastors who have completed their seminary training is scheduled for July 2023.

The theological education of Hmong pastors in Vietnam, led by full-time professors Rev. Bounkeo Lor and Rev. Joel Nitz, trains those pastors to train other spiritual leaders. When COVID began, instruction shifted to online Zoom training, and a new three-year rural training program was started in order to reach more leaders *and* members in the rural congregations of the HFC. Until now efforts have focused on the first group of 57 students, who have completed their instruction in biblical and Lutheran doctrine. Now a second group of 60 students have begun their training. These men are taking what they learn and sharing it with nearly 1,500 local spiritual leaders of the HFC. The new education center will be a great blessing to the hundreds of rural HFC congregations as Lor and Nitz continue to equip their leaders to bring them the truth of God's Word.

Future plans are for Lor and Nitz, who so far have been making intermittent trips to Vietnam or using Zoom for training, to relocate to Hanoi to oversee the theological education program. Residency visas for Lor and Nitz and HFC government registration are still pending, but it is our prayer that paperwork will be finalized by the July trip.

Stay up to date on progress and learn more at [wels.net/vietnamhmongoutreach](https://wels.net/vietnamhmongoutreach).

Serving with you in Christ,  
WELS President Mark Schroeder