

Christ is risen!

*In the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit*

In our Confessions Luther says,

*“Thank God, today a seven-year-old child knows what the church is,  
namely, holy believers, lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd.”<sup>1</sup>*

In the Nicene Creed, which we confess every time we gather around our Lord’s gifts in the Sacrament, we say,

*“I believe in one, holy, Christian, and apostolic Church.”*

Then there’s Psalm 23, which most of us know by heart,

*“The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.”*

And then there’s the art—

all those kind pictures of shepherds carrying sheep.

It’s all so easy...

And then we go home.

For some of us, it’s even the car-ride home, where the picture is tossed out the window!  
The serene and still waters seem ages ago, or out of mind completely.  
The arguments begin, the children fight, the parents yell.  
The stress of reality is overwhelming.

I just spent the last 4 days in the hospital with my Dad.

And even though I’m at the hospital here weekly, and sometimes more, this was different.  
It’s my Dad.

And while we were in the hospital, suffering together,  
the news drew us into the suffering of the people of Boston.

Where’s the Shepherd now?

Where are these green pastures He’s supposed to lead us to?

It doesn’t seem like they’re in the hospital,  
or anywhere to be found in the city of Boston.

Why is it so hard?

Why are our families so broken?

Why does God seem at times so distant?

Where is our comfort, our peace, our joy?

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<sup>1</sup> *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, ed. Paul McCain; Smalcald Articles III.XII.2.

And then what about the Church?

We confess that we believe in *One* church—  
but look around!

How many denominations are there?

How many fights, how many differences—look at the hatred!

Where is this *One Church* to be found?

If the Church is simply lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd,  
why is it so hard to hear His voice?

Sometimes I think I hear Him, but He's not the only one!

And how do I know it's Him?

What if it's the wrong shepherd—  
or worse yet, a wolf?

How can so many get it so wrong?

And who's to say this one's right and the others aren't?

To be honest, I often wish I could go back and be a 7-year-old child again.

At least they seem to get it.

In the face of suffering we're tempted to think that we can sort out how God thinks of us  
by what happens around us and to us.

But the Scriptures direct us not to the circumstances of our lives—  
whether good or bad—

they direct us to the cross, where we can really see what God thinks of us.

St. Paul gives us a clue to this in today's first reading.

He says,

*"We must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He Himself said,  
'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"* (Acts 20:35)

Every other shepherd is there to receive.

If you look at leaders today, they're in it for themselves.

The politics of this country is a constant story of doing whatever it takes to get the vote.

Teachers teach to the test so their classes can show the excellence of the teacher.

Every leader cares about himself first.

Because that's who we are as sinners.

It's about us.

It's about honor and pride, struggle and force, power and charisma.

It's about getting awards and accolades—

people talking about how well I do, how smart I am, how well I handled the situation.

That's what you'll get from your leaders,

because that's what you'll get from yourself.

And leaders work by force—  
 they've got to look like leaders and act like leaders.  
 And so they'll do what it takes to distance themselves from those they lead.

But that's not what you get from Jesus.

Our Shepherd has become a Sheep—a Lamb.  
 He's the Lamb gone astray, wandering off from the 99,  
 who's silent before His shearers, and gets caught in the thicket by His horns,  
 He lays His neck down on the altar, and willingly gives His life for the flock.

He is the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world—  
 the scapegoat, the lamb without blemish,  
 He's the sacrificial Lamb.

Rather than asking,  
 "Why do bad things happen to good people?"—  
 because there aren't any good people to begin with—  
 we should be asking,  
 "Why do all the bad things of the world happen to the ONE good person—Jesus?"

In the face of suffering, we're not pointed to ourselves, but to this Christ,  
 who suffered all for us.

And the Scriptures are clear as to why:  
 God loves you.

And because He loves you,  
 our Father has wakened from death the Shepherd of His sheep.

Our Epistle from Revelation says,  
*"The Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd,  
 and He will guide them to springs of living water."* (Rev 7:17)

The serenity of Psalm 23, the quiet waters, the green pastures, the restored soul—  
 all of this comes from the Lord, who is our Shepherd—  
 but this Shepherd Lord, is the pierced Lamb of God.

And this Shepherd Lamb isn't here for Himself.  
 There's nothing you could give Him that He doesn't already have.  
 He has no lack, no want, no imperfection, no sin.  
 And yet He bears in His body the marks of our sin.

This Lamb is bloody.  
 The Shepherd has laid down His life for the sheep.

And it's this bloody Lamb that the Church gathers around,  
 both now in the face of suffering—  
     in the wake of the Boston bombings,  
     at the bedside of a cancer patient,  
     and even at the cemetery—  
 .and then also in eternity.

St. John says in his Revelation,  
*“After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number,  
 from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages,  
 standing before the throne and before the Lamb.”* (Rev 7:9)

This great multitude is the One, Holy, Christian, and Apostolic Church.  
 This great multitude is us—  
     even though right now we don't look anything like it.  
 It's us after our struggles, after our doubts, after our cancer and infections and brokenness.  
 It's us, washed clean and made white, all *in the blood of the Lamb*.

This is a picture of us—  
     not as we see things today—  
     but as we really are.

And that's why the seven-year-old child gets it.  
 They *believe* it.  
 And that's what our creed says anyhow:  
*“I believe in one, holy, Christian, and apostolic Church...”*

We're constantly called to live by faith, not by sight.  
 Psalm 23, the picture of heaven in John's revelation, the One Church—  
     these are what we're waiting for,  
     what we believe,  
     what we've heard,  
     what we hope for,  
     and what we have already in Christ by faith!

The voice of your Shepherd is the voice of the Lamb who was slain,  
     who took your place,  
     who took your death,  
     who took your brokenness and anger and cancer and overwhelming guilt.  
     He took all that was yours and gave you all that is His.

Our Shepherd is the one who gives.  
 Jesus says in today's Gospel,  
*“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.  
 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish,  
 and no one will snatch them out of My hand.”* (Jn 10:27-28).

So Paul was right,

*“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”* (Acts 20:35)

Christ has given all for you.

He is the blessed One.

He is the Lamb-Shepherd.

His is the voice that we follow, His wounds guide the way.

He knows us, and we are His.

And no one will snatch us from His hand.

For He and the Father are One.

*In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit*