



# Faithful & Afire

## LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2011-2012 **The Under-Shepherd – Under the Cross**

### Participant's Guide

September 2011

#### THE UNDERSHEPHERD – UNDER THE CROSS:

#### **“The Shepherd as Sheep”**

##### **1. Focus of This Study**

This Bible study has the title, “The Shepherd as Sheep.” At best, that seems like a contradiction. Shepherd and sheep are two distinctly different creatures and have distinctly different roles. Is it possible for shepherds to understand themselves as sheep?

The Scriptures speak of those who have been entrusted with certain leadership roles in God's kingdom as shepherds. At various times, that includes kings, priests, and prophets of the Old Testament Israel. Then, in the New Testament, there are the pastors of the New Israel, the Church. The word *pastor*, taken directly from the Latin, literally means shepherd. Yet the Scriptures speak of *all* of those who are God's people as sheep. The great “shepherd king” David certainly recognizes his dual identity as he confesses: “The Lord is my Shepherd.” For him who was chosen by God to lead the People of Israel as a shepherd, it is most natural for David to see himself also as a sheep who depends on the gracious guidance and care of his Good Shepherd (cf. Ps. 23). For David, there is no tension between being a shepherd and being a sheep at the same moment.

In the Christian faith, we live with the reality that many matters of faith and life cannot be categorized by what may be called an “either/or polarity.” The very nature of Christ is the most obvious example. Scripture teaches and the Church confesses that “it is the right faith that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is at the same time both God and man” (Athanasian Creed, 28). No “either/or” there! Luther's understanding, based on Scripture, that a believer in Christ is *simil iustus et peccator* is another prime example. A believer is neither at one moment solely a sinner condemned under the Law, nor in a different moment a purely righteous individual justified by Christ. Rather, like the Apostle Paul, a believer is aware of his “wretched” nature, but at the same time is even more aware that in Christ there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (cf. Rom. 7:24 – 8:1).

God and man. Saint and sinner. Shepherd and sheep. All at the same instant.

For those of us who are called as pastors – undershepherds of the great Good Shepherd Jesus Christ – it is incumbent upon us that we never lose sight of our dual status. While we are called to keep watch over “all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made [us] overseers” (cf. Acts 20:28), we must never lose sight of the reality that we have exactly the same spiritual needs as the sheep in the flock which has been entrusted to us.

In this study, we who are shepherds are reminded that like the sheep under our care, we are constant beggars before God and, at the same time, we are the perpetual recipients of the gifts of God.

##### **For Discussion**

- As pastors, we are both shepherd and sheep. As we stand before God as beggars, how are our needs as both shepherd and sheep the same?

How do our needs in each role differ?

- We are both shepherd and sheep. Recognizing our differing and often distinctive gifts and personalities, in which role do we find ourselves the most comfortable? Please explain why.
- Is it possible that our identity as sheep (with faults and weaknesses) among the other sheep in our flock *lessen* their perception or understanding of the shepherding authority we are called to exercise in the Office of Undershepherd? Explain.
- Might our identity as sheep among the other sheep in our flock *enhance* their perception of us as their shepherd? Explain.

## 2. Scripture Search

### Read Exodus 3:1 – 4:17

God identifies Himself to Moses and reveals His plan of rescue for His people. However, when God calls Moses from tending his flock to leading the People of Israel, Moses begs God neither for the strength nor for the gifts necessary to lead or shepherd the People of Israel but rather that God would find someone else.

- What arguments (chapter and verse) does Moses give against this service to which he has been called?
  - Were these arguments valid?
  - Identify in each instance God's provision.
- When we are called upon for the Lord's service – either to the public ministry or to other projects or positions of responsibility within the public ministry, what arguments have we given against the service to which we have been called?
  - Are our arguments ever valid? Why or why not?
  - Identify in your own ministry experience examples of God's gracious provision.

### Read Luke 10:1-3 and 2 Corinthians 2:14 – 3:6

It is incumbent upon every shepherd that he strive to be faithful (cf. 1 Cor. 4:1-2). Nonetheless, the devil is at work wherever the Gospel is preached. Jesus certainly had this in mind as he sent out the seventy-two: "I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves."

Every shepherd will experience opposition and accusations about his preaching, his teaching, his pastoral abilities, and his general competency.

After Paul's departure from Corinth and following his first letter, false teachers called into question both his teachings and his qualifications as an apostle.

- In describing his ministry in Chapter 2:15, Paul descriptively contrasts the perspectives that people have toward those who spread the knowledge of Christ.
  - In what instances have you been either the "stench of death" or the "fragrance of life"?
  - How has this affected your perspective about shepherding your flock?
- In 2 Corinthians Chapter 3:4-6, Paul places the focus of his confidence concerning ministry not upon his own skills or abilities, but squarely upon God who provides in abundance.
  - Describe how this assurance serves those who are called to be shepherds, and specifically, how this assurance has and continues to serve you.

- If our competency is “from God,” might this excuse us from the responsibility to develop deeper understanding of the Scriptures and the Confessions or to develop specialized skills for pastoral care, for outreach, or other aspects of ministry? Do these not come automatically (cf. 2 Tim. 2:15)?

**Read Isaiah 53:1-7; Ezekiel 34:1-10; John 10:12-13 & 15**

Through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord gives various pictures of the Suffering Servant. He is like a shoot and a root (Is. 53:2; cf. Is. 11:1-10). He is a man of sorrows (Is. 53:3). He is a lamb and a sheep (Is. 53:7). The One who identifies Himself as the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep (cf. John 10:11,15) becomes one of the sheep in order to give Himself as sacrifice for the other sheep who have gone astray (Is. 53: 5-6).

- As shepherds, we are also sheep who have gone astray. Rather than the faithful shepherd who searches and finds the lost sheep of our flock (cf. Lk. 15:3-7), at times through our own sinfulness we have, like the shepherds of Israel, been more concerned about ourselves (cf. Ez. 34:2-6). We have not always strengthened the weak, or bound up the injured, or searched for the lost. Like the hireling of John 10:12, at times we have fled from the flock rather than confronting the wolves that have come to us in various forms.
  - From what “wolves” have you fled?
  - Jacob, who was also a shepherd, confessed to God, “I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies...Thou hast shown unto Thy servant” (Gen. 32:10). The Apostle Paul, confessed that he was a “wretched man” (Rom. 7:24) and the “chief of sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15). How can our own sinful expectations of ourselves or the sinful expectations of others prevent us from honest confession?
  - Dare we, as “shepherds of God’s flock” that is under our care (1 Pet. 5:2) and “examples to the flock” (1 Pet. 5:3) confess before our flock that we are “poor, miserable sinners”?
- Jesus is the Good Shepherd who also becomes the Lamb led to slaughter (Is. 53:7) for the sheep of His flock, for other sheep (John 10:16), and for us. In the vision of the multitudes in heaven given in Revelation 7, all who enjoy the triumph of eternal life are those sinners who “have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (14). Jesus is the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29) by His sacrificial death on the cross and His triumphant resurrection from the dead. However, He is also the Shepherd of Psalm 23, Ezekiel 34:23-24, and Revelation 7:14 who in His ascension and exaltation leads and blesses His flock now and forever.
  - We are blessed beyond measure. As sheep, our Good Shepherd has sought us out when we were lost or straying, and through His Sacraments and Word has enfolded us into His flock and continually gathers us to Himself. He has laid down His life for us and has risen again. He has forgiven us. He leads us. He cares for us. He also feeds, nourishes, and refreshes us through His Word and Sacraments. He gives us the confidence of life eternal. In addition, as shepherds, He has entrusted us to be stewards of His life-giving Word and Sacraments, equipping and empowering us by the Holy Spirit. Describe the impact on you, as a shepherd, from knowing first-hand the grace and gifts of Jesus to you as a sheep.

### **3. From Our Lutheran Perspective**

- Lutherans, perhaps better than any others, understand the special relationship between the pastoral ministry (shepherds) and the priesthood of all believers (sheep). While not all sheep in the flock are called to be shepherds, all shepherds are still part of the sheep. While we honor the pastoral ministry (Predigtamt) as “the highest office in the church” (cf. Church and Ministry, Part Two, Thesis VIII), we also recognize that “The ministry is not a special or, in opposition to that of ordinary Christians, a more holy state...but it is a ministry of service” (cf.

Church and Ministry, Part Two, Thesis IV). We are also familiar with the words of one of Luther's Sacristy Prayers: "Lord God, You have appointed me as a Bishop and Pastor in Your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked Your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon You: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon Your Word. Use me as Your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all."

- Discuss the danger when shepherds fail to see themselves also as sheep, both in failing to recognize that "we are all beggars," and in failing to recognize that we all are the perpetual recipients of God's grace, guidance, and blessings.

#### **4. Points to Ponder**

- Occasionally, a birthing ewe will reject one of its newborn lambs, especially in the instance of a multiple birth. Likewise, from time to time, a ewe will die giving birth. The result is a "bummer lamb." Left to itself and without its mother's nurture and nourishment, the bummer lamb will die. From time to time, another lamb in the flock will die during or shortly after its birth. Because ewes bond with their newborn lambs, in part due to the scent of their lambs, a ewe normally will not adopt a bummer lamb with its foreign scent. An age-old practice is to cover the bummer lamb with the hide of a lamb that has died and bring that lamb to the ewe. Smelling the scent of her own lamb, a ewe will allow the bummer lamb to nurse and, within a couple of days, will adopt the bummer lamb even when the dead lamb's hide is removed.
- While this lambing illustration is not specifically given in Scripture, what may be applications for us in our role as sheep and as shepherds?

#### **5. For Conversation**

- "In my last church, my pastor preached as if he were preaching to himself as well as to the congregation. He included the words 'we' and 'us' throughout his sermons. In my new church, the pastor almost never speaks about 'we' and 'us,' but almost always uses the word 'you.' While I know that he is God's messenger to the people of the congregation, it seems that he's setting himself above the rest of us." This comment by a faithful layperson is not uncommon when there has been a change of pastors. Different pastors not only have different preaching styles, they have reasons for their different styles. Remember the "either/or" polarity mentioned at the beginning of this study. Sometimes that polarity manifests itself in our sermons. Preachers are God's messengers (cf. Lk. 10:16, Mt. 10:40; Jn. 20:21-13). Often, in Scripture, God's messengers address their hearers with the second person 'you' (cf. 2 Sam. 12:7; Acts 2:22-14; 7:51; Luke 2:10-12). But His messengers also frequently use the first person words 'I' and 'me' and 'we' and 'us' (cf. Rom. 5:1-8; 7:4-25; 2 Cor. 5:1-10; Jas. 3:2-3; 1 Jn. 4:7ff). Sometimes, in the course of the same message, they use both the first and second person (cf. Gal. 3:23-27; 1 Pet. 1:3-9).
- Shepherds as sheep, like all the rest of the sheep, are constant beggars before God. Discuss how our preaching reflects both our own spiritual needs as well as the spiritual needs of the sheep to hear the Law in its full severity and the Gospel in all its sweetness.
- Shepherds as sheep, like all the rest of the sheep, are perpetual recipients from God. Discuss how our preaching and our lives give testimony of God's grace and providence both to us and the other sheep in His flock.

Rev. Dr. Dale L. Sattgast  
E-mail: [sdpres@midco.net](mailto:sdpres@midco.net)