

Miseracordias Domini

"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Last Sunday, Jesus left us with these words ringing in our ears.

Blessed are those who do not seek sensational proof of Jesus' words.

For which of you could even know for sure what it will look like--or feel like--when Jesus' words come true for you?

This has been the history of God's dealing with sinful man.

He promised of the tree, *"In the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die."*

We ate and are still living, growing and prospering. Did He lie to us?

Did he not really mean, "in that day" but in some "latter-day"?

Did He not really mean "surely die" but rather: "begin to die"?

Or is He Himself so True that our very notion of reality must change to fit Him?

St. Paul got it right: *"let God be true, but every man a liar"* Rom. 3:4

In the quiet serenity of this place, you of course know these things.

When we hear of Thomas we quietly castigate him and congratulate ourselves for believing even though we have never felt the wounds like he did.

But if this is as far as you think about Jesus' words, you will never come to recognize the multitude of ways that you yourself call God a liar.

For faith is not only about believing the resurrection without visible confirmation.

Faith embraces all of Jesus' words and promises.

Faith affirms them all to be true *a priori* -- from the outset -- whether or not you ever see, feel, taste, smell or hear what you would consider proof.

It is now from this viewpoint that we hear Jesus speak today.

"I am the Good Shepherd."

What is it that makes this true? And what would falsify this claim?

Is it because, when you follow Christ, you become successful in every endeavor?

Is it because, you will no longer experience the sensations of hunger or pain?

If Jesus allowed you to fall into the hands of evil men who tortured you to death, would He then be proven a fraud?

If He allowed your comfort-level to be shattered and your world-view challenged at every turn, would it prove that there is a Better Shepherd out there.

If others who do not listen to His voice or mediate on His commands nevertheless live contentedly does this mean there are other Good Shepherds?

To place Jesus' words to such shallow and meaningless tests would be no more noble and no more useful than placing your fingers in His hands.

Rather, Jesus today gives you another measure of His Goodness.

A measure which transcends all other measures.

"The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep."

This is not just His physical life that He is talking about --anymore than the death that was threatened in Eden was according to our definition.

Rather, the life that Jesus gives for you true life as God defines life.

It is unbroken communion with God the Father.

It is eternal intimacy and fellowship with our very source and creator.

It is this life, this intimacy, this communion which Jesus gave for you.

He was forsaken of God and rejected to be your Good Shepherd.

Just as Joseph was dead to His Father in order to become the ruler of Egypt...

So also Jesus, being in very nature God, nevertheless died to God to be your ruler. This is a mystery beyond all comprehension.

But it is such that it makes Jesus' claims wholly and completely unique.

No one else ever did or ever could give His life for the Sheep.

Not true life. Others have ceased to breathe on behalf of friends.

But no one ever before or since has done what Jesus has done for your.

"Who committed no sin, nor was guile found in His mouth"; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness--by whose stripes you were healed."

Therefore Jesus alone and unqualifiedly is the Good Shepherd.

No better shepherd will come along and there is nothing that could happen in heaven, hell or earth that would proven Him to be less than Good.

He is as much the Good Shepherd to the martyr as to the Christian who dies in bed.

He is the Good Shepherd of the starving Christian and the sated one.

He is your Good Shepherd in the midst of trials and in the midst of ease.

Your Good Shepherd is constantly so -- not on again off again as are we.

Only when you believe this will you follow...

...And only when you follow do you believe.

Jesus' little lambs tune into His words and ignore all others.

Jesus' little lambs follow Him wherever He may lead without fearing that He will lead them into some bad place.

Jesus little lambs know that even the valley of the shadow of death is a pleasant pasture when the Good Shepherd leads you there.

Little lambs know that even the chastening rod and the shepherd's crook are comforting when in the hand of the Good Shepherd.

His lambs know that even the cup of sorrows is a sweet libation when it is in the hand of the Good Shepherd.

For whether your cup tastes like sorrow or like joy, it is a cup that the Good Shepherd shares with you.

You have a place with Him at His table--with His whole family.

And when you falter and stumble.

When you stop believing this.

When your life becomes such that you question the Goodness of your Shepherd and entertain thoughts of ceasing to follow.

When His Words lose their savor and His voice sounds harsh.

The Good Shepherd invites you to His table.

He beckons you to sit at his table with Him. Let Him instruct you toward that goal.

And through that very instruction and eating, He will again show you His tender mercy and everlasting-goodness.

For the Good Shepherd cannot ever be bad.

The Truth Himself cannot ever be false.

The Way Himself can never deceive.

And the Life Himself will never bring death.

For you were like sheep going astray, but have here returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. AMEN.