**John 10:22-30 (ESV)**

**“**At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, **23** and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon. **24** So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.” **25** Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about me, **26** but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock. **27**  My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. **28**  I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. **29** My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. **30**  I and the Father are one.”

**“Watch Out Wolves”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen (Galatians 1:3-5). Not since 9/11 has insecurity been a problem upon American soil until last week in Boston. Sure, there were “close calls” and rogue shootings, but this was a successful bombing of terrorism. They struck at a time when spirits were high, the finish line in sight, and crowds were cheering for victory. Thank God, there were medics, police officers, and others prepared to face the darkness. When things became insecure, they were able to secure the situation, help the hurting, and hunt down the enemy.

The Feast of Dedication, also known as Hanukkah, has roots in gaining security lost. It celebrates when Judas Maccabeus and his army took back the temple from the Greeks in 163 BC. Antiochus Epiphanes, the ruler claiming to be god, forcibly built statues of Zeus and slaughtered pigs in the temple. It caused a revolt by the Jews that after 25+ years finally drove out the Greeks. There is nothing small about the sacrifices and dedication needed for securing such a victory. Except, when Jesus later appeared on this feast day as God manifest to save. Plenty of insecurity got in the way of His eternal promise for sinners. Yet, who can protect against sin, death, and the Devil? Only the good shepherd Jesus calls and keeps us safe in His Name.

Where sheep scatter, wolves work together in safety to stand against the shepherd. The goal of wolves is to seek out something to eat. How easily does Jesus attract the danger to Himself. “So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.” This coming around Jesus was not to learn, not to be His disciple, but to confront Him. If the Greek ruler Antiochus was proven not to be god by their ancestors. They had plans to do the same with Jesus claim on being the Messiah. Unfortunately, their aggressive and selfish ambitions were exposed. Jesus said, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock.”

The wolves still gather around Christ in our time. They stand against His true presence in Word and Sacrament. They seek to put down and challenge His Holy Ministry. They attempt to confuse and destroy the Gospel. It is the old game of strength in numbers. In the face of this our Lutheran Fathers declare, “Although our opponents arrogate to themselves the name of the church, therefore, we know that the church of Christ is among those who teach the Gospel, not among those who defend wicked opinions against the Gospel…” (Tappert 168:400). Jesus exposes the wolves who do not belong to His flock. They reject Him as God and Savior be it unrepentant sinners, cults like Mormons, or false religions of works. Jesus protects the sheep by laying down His life before the wolves. As St. John said, “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

Where wolves gather to hunt, sheep need the safety of the shepherd to gather them by His Word. How inviting is Jesus. How compassionate to weakness. How comforting to fears. How uplifting to failures. God wants to save sinners. He told them, “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.” What the Jews celebrated over the feast of dedication in cleansing the temple could not compare to the dedication and cleansing Christ gave alone as Savior for all eternity. To be His sheep was not a glorious self-image at the present. Nor was it to be among the righteous, but sinners. Neither was it to be alone, but together following the One Shepherd Jesus. Strength was not internal, but an external Word of safety against sin, death, and the Devil.

Our society with individualism has reached idolatrous levels. Many by self-expression or personal freedom are now easy food for wolves. If the mantra is, “we need leaders for the people.” Jesus says “repent” for His people are sheep in need of Him. Martin Luther states, “If Christ, your Shepherd, did not seek you and bring you back, you would simply have to fall prey to the wolf. But now He comes, seeks, and finds you. He takes you into His flock, that is, into Christendom, through the Word and the Sacrament. He gives His life for you, keeps you always on the right path, so that you may not fall into error…If you wish, therefore, to be richly supplied in both body and soul, then above all give careful attention to the voice of this Shepherd, listen to His words, let Him feed, direct, lead, protect, and comfort you.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Pastor is Latin for shepherd and it literally means feeder. The baptized in Christ are sheep in need of His Word. St. Paul said, “I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.” Food is for life and so Jesus’ Word forgives, directs, and sustains His sheep.

Where protection is against the wolves and sheep need feeding. The Shepherd is “good” because eternal life is safe for us with Jesus as God. He says, “My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.” As insecure as the times, what troubled the unbelieving Jews most was Jesus even at His crucifixion. During His trial, **“**…the high priest said to him, “I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.” Jesus said to him, “You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matthew 26:63-64). Not earthly means for security by men, not the pain of judgment by His cross, and not death itself would remove the good shepherd.

Jesus is our only lasting security in this fallen world. He paid the price for sin, felt the punishment we deserve and reigns now with love as God our Savior. It means to call upon the Father is to worship and honor His Son. If salvation rested in our hands than we have no need of the Gospel, no need of a shepherd, and no need of Jesus to be God. Yet, as tragic as terrorism may be. As insecure as we might feel. Everything is secure. The perfect praise in heaven by the saints joins the insecurity of trembling sheep on earth to sing, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” It is false to twist Jesus’ Words to be only for the present life. As if by the Gospel, you do not already have eternity by faith in Jesus , which is a far better thing to come. Baptism holds the promise, absolution delivers this confidence, and the sacrament gives His presence for our security. No, we are more than conquerors through Him who loves us. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia. Amen.

1. Luther, M. (1999, c1955). *Vol. 12*: *Luther's works, vol. 12 : Selected Psalms I* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works (Ps 23:2). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)