

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours in the name of our Good Shepherd and Saviour, Jesus Christ. The title for today's message is *'The Lamb'* and is based on Psalm 23. Let us pray... Amen.

How do you cope with, and handle stress? We all face stress at different times, and deal with the stresses in different ways. There are those small stresses, those things which are easily managed or forgotten, but then there are the much, much bigger ones, from health, finances, weather, work, family, and, well insert your stress here. For every stress, there are a plethora of different theories for how to handle it. Yet, even with positive thinking and relaxing breathing, the stresses remain until the root of the stress is reconciled.

The root behind all stress is SIN, period. If there were no SIN in the world, there would be no stress. If WE didn't SIN, WE wouldn't cause additional stress on ourselves and others. Sin causes stress, in part because it causes conflict, and in part because the consequence of sin is death—eternal death, everlasting separation from God, and unending torment in the fires of hell.

Now you may say, 'hold on here, what I'm worrying and stressing about is not that serious.' Actually, it could be deadly serious.

That stress on your mind, the one which keeps you awake at night, the one you just can't stop thinking about because you just cannot figure out the solution; that stress which constantly eats at you could just be the devil placing huge wedge between you and God—to try to draw you away from the Shepherd so he can devour you. He is pounding the wedge in to have you forget about the Good Shepherd, the One who came, the One who carried all your sins and stresses, the One who nailed them permanently to the cross, the One who covered them with his blood, the One who died in your place, that same One who rose again that first Easter morning proclaiming His victory! When anything gets between you and Christ, that is a false god, the kind the first Commandment forbids by saying 'You shall have NO other gods!' If any stress causes you fear, love, and/or trust in something more than the Triune God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that 'thing' has become a false god and an idol, and that 'thing' stressing you out could also be eternally killing you.

Now, I am NOT saying in this life, as a baptized child of God, you will be immune from stresses. I am NOT saying that as a Christian, and as part of the holy Christian church you will not have any troubles. The truth is the devil and his demons absolutely despise you and want nothing more than to tear you away from the Good Shepherd, His protection, and His salvation freely given to you. The devil and his demons are hell-bent to attack you in just about any way to cause you to take your eyes off Christ, His cross and empty tomb, and His victory won for you there. Stress causes a person to start looking at themselves and their troubles instead of the grace, mercy, comfort, peace, strength, forgiveness, and eternal life, freely given through God's Word on account of Christ and His work for you! Yes, you are going to have stress and trouble

in this life. To think otherwise would be naïve. BUT, you are not alone, nor do you have to face Satan, sin, this world, or even death on your own two feet.

It is surprising how similar we are to lambs or sheep. Of all the animals God created, in many ways we are most similar to sheep. (Perhaps that is why God calls us sheep?) Now most people don't enjoying being called sheep, but the description is accurate. We share similar characteristics, such as: Mob instincts, Fears, Timidity, Stubbornness, Stupidity, and Perverse habits. Without a shepherd we quickly scatter. Without the Good Shepherd we would be lost and devoured by the wolves.

Yet, despite our unworthiness, and other negative qualities, God still sent the Good Shepherd to gather us, lead us, and protect us. Through God's Word and Sacraments, the Holy Spirit ***"calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith."***(Small Catechism, 3<sup>rd</sup> Article: WDTM)

Because we are saved by God's grace through faith on account of Jesus' work, we can stand. Because Christ promises He will never leave us or forsake us, we can take comfort in the midst of troubles and stresses and trust in God and His faithfulness. Because God has given us His Word we can read it, hear it, pray it, sing it, meditate on it, and stand secure in the sure promise of our deliverance in Christ Jesus, our Good Shepherd.

Jesus publically proclaimed and promised in our Gospel reading: ***"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> I and the Father are one."***(John 10:27-30)

Jesus also comforts us in times of stress and troubles saying, ***"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."***(Matthew 11:28-30) No matter what the situation, stress, or problem, Christ is with you inviting you to take them all to Him and He will guide you through.

Paul experienced humility, trial, and tears in his ministry. Yet, through it all, he also knew God's comfort amidst troubles and stresses. He expressed his comfort and hope in God's revealed Word in the First Reading to the elders from Ephesus. He also wrote to the Philippians telling them; ***"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. <sup>5</sup> Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; <sup>6</sup> do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."***(Philippians 4:4-7)

Paul was not naïve to troubles. He had personally seen the wolves and had suffered at their hands. Despite everything he faced, he held on tight to his, and our, Good Shepherd. In the face of arrest and persecution Paul still held forth the Word of God because only in God's Word is their forgiveness and salvation.

King David also knew this same comfort in God and beautifully expressed it when he wrote psalm 23. In spite of all the problems and stresses he faced, he too held on tight to the Good Shepherd. I invite you to close your eyes as I read Psalm 23.

**The LORD Is My Shepherd:** A PSALM OF DAVID.

- <sup>1</sup> The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
- <sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.
- <sup>3</sup> He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
- <sup>4</sup> Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
- <sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;  
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
- <sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,  
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever. (ESV)

Christ is your Good Shepherd and you are securely held in His hand. Yes, you will face stresses and troubles in this life, but through it all Jesus promises to comfort and lead you with His Word to the safety and security of eternal life. You have God's revealed and inspired Word written for your salvation. You also have to privilege in good times and bad, in times of comfort or in times of stress, to read, sing, meditate, and pray them and be comforted and strengthened by God's grace. You are His, and there is nothing in all of creation that can take you out of His hand. Thank be to God! Amen.

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