

Lent Midweek 4—March 10, 2021
Text: John 10:7-14
Theme: O Sacred Head Now Wounded v.4

As we continue our series on the hymn “O Sacred Head Now Wounded,” tonight we come to the shepherd stanza. We behold our shepherd hanging on the cross. It is a highly paradoxical image. The humility and love of a shepherd combined with the gruesome execution of society’s worst kind of criminal. The one who defends us from the evil one, has been crucified for us. The one who feeds us with his word, his body and his blood, has been put to death in a most hideous way and not only put to death, but damned to Hell.

I’m not saying this to inflict guilt and shame. We need feel no guilt or shame because that is exactly why he did what he did. It had to be this way to save us and it is the Father’s will that we be saved. We had nothing to say about it one way or the other. He formulated His plan the moment Satan lured Adam and Eve into sin. His son would crush the serpents head and this is how he would do it.

In his exuberance at the thought of claiming God for eternity in Hell, Satan over-played his hand. His problem from the beginning is his failure to understand that God’s majesty and power are part of who and what he is. Power, majesty, holiness, justice, mercy: they are attributes not abilities just as hydrogen and oxygen are

attributes of water, not abilities. Satan can no more conquer God than a stone can solve quadratic equations.

We don't know precisely what God was thinking as he devised His plan for our salvation, but the sheep and wolf metaphor is a good one. Wolves want to eat sheep. That's who and what they are. Sheep are completely vulnerable to wolves. That is who and what they are. Only the shepherd stands between the wolf and the sheep to slay the wolf and protect the sheep. That is who and what he is.

Our Shepherd is not some minor personage who occupies a corner of our lives one day a week and a couple special days during the year. Our Shepherd is the center of our world who stood then and stands now between us and the wolf. Only he fends off the wolf. We have no more ability to protect ourselves from the claws and teeth of Satan that a baby lamb can fend off a Great Grey wolf. We spend this time each year focused on our Shepherd's death on the cross, not to shame us for our sin, but to remind us that our sin is forgiven and therefore holds no power over us. Our Shepherd conquered Satan on that cross. He paid for our sin by being damned for us, and then he rose from the dead.

Sin, Satan and death have no power over us. We are free to live lives of joy and service and are bound to no one but our

Shepherd. This verse reminds us that this life is not the center of our being but merely an entryway to paradise. That is why we can live in joy no matter what struggles we have. We know that our Shepherd waits to receive us. "My Shepherd, now receive me; My Guardian, own me Thine." We like to defend our complete freedom in this life, particularly in America where freedom is often idolized, but do not protest too much. There is great peace and joy in being owned by the right master. You and I are owned. St. Paul freely calls us slaves. The text from St. John says,

"He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me...." The hired man. Who is he? Perhaps he is everyone who does not own us, the sheep. The things we are tempted to have confidence in, but cannot help us when we are in danger. When the wolf comes, we want our master to be there, the one who does own us, the shepherd. It is the shepherd who has bought us and has already prepared a place for us in paradise when our time of service here is over. He owns us and we rejoice that we are owned by him.