

A shepherd in dangerous times

Sermon on the Sunday of the Good Shepherd 2 Peter 1, 21-25



To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 22 "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." 23 When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. 24 "He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed." 25 For "you were like sheep going astray," but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

In these weeks, our lives have changed completely. Everything has changed or been canceled. Those who still have work must work from home; shopping has become an extraordinary adventure; even the dog is astounded that his masters are forever willing to go for walkies. Church on Sunday ... canceled. Even leisure time has changed. After this endless curfew, the clock will hopefully turn back to normal soon. And we can gradually pick up where we left off a few weeks ago. Or will our normal life not be recognizable? Starting with today's church service in Leipzig. We are sitting in a large church with fewer than 15 people. We cannot yet have The Lords Supper The Corona virus has torn away structure from our lives. And this is what we humans need. We need structure and planning security. But the question is this: Wasn't our so-called "normal" completely out of hand a long time ago? Isn't it perhaps the orderly structure that pretends to be something that has long ceased to exist? If you take a closer look, our world has never been normal. There is countless evidence of this. Exploitation of nature, exploitation of the poor, endless wars and countless people suffering for eg around Europe's borders, to name just a few examples. So the question is: didn't the Corona virus reveal something that we could otherwise only hide too well? Namely, that we are vulnerable. It's not just our bodies that are vulnerable. Our souls are vulnerable too! And they are hurting to badly! Our souls are hurting far more than our bodies are! Maybe just because you can't see what's going on in our soul, we can hide these things away so well. We carry so much with us. Injuries, disappointments, hatred and bitterness ... And for years. When we read the Bible, we notice that people have never been whole. People are hurt and they need healing: We are like sheep gone astray, Jesus has summarized and the letter to Peter quotes exactly these words here.

But exactly as we humans are structurally ill and lost, Jesus has given us a completely new structure. In the above verses from the Letter to Peter it says: "Jesus left us a model or an eg." This word "model or eg" occurs only once in the New Testament and comes from the school system at that time. Because papyrus was very expensive at this time, the children could not learn to write on expensive papyrus. That is why a slice of wax was prepared for them. Unlike the papyrus, the wax could be smoothed over and over again if the children had written something wrong. The teacher prepared the writing with a very thin pen on the wax slab. The students only had to follow the contours of the given fine print. And this is exactly where the word "role model" comes from, which the letter to Peter uses here. What is meant is that Jesus gives us a completely new way of life and a completely new Letterhead to write on. We no longer need to live according to the old pattern, we have a completely new pattern. Sometimes the gentle contours that are prescribed by our Lord Jesus are not clearly visible, because it is so fine... Therefore we look longingly for it. Where can I find this Jesus! Especially in these days when we could no longer go to church services, we look longingly for him. Some have

heard or seen worship services on the Internet. Some have sought closeness to Jesus in other ways.

As the African Bushman searches for tracks in the sand in the desert, we strain our eyes to see the tracks of our Lord Jesus Sandals in the sand. If the whole person is missing, we are on the lookout for something that will announce his proximity. We just want to be close to our Lord! Nothing else! Because we are Christians, we want that. And we can start with the first apostles. They recognized Jesus' Tracks. More than that! They heard his words. And they realized that they wanted to belong to Jesus. And they heard his call: "Follow me!" They left everything behind and just wanted to be with Jesus. What prompted the first disciples to follow Jesus like this? Jesus would not become a famous movie star. He was also not promising riches. He didn't promise a life without worries either. On the contrary: His life led straight to a miserable and cruel death on the cross. And yet the disciples of all people ran after him. We know the reason from Isaiah 53, which the first letter to Peter quotes here. "He carried our sin away on the cross ... And through his wounds we are healed!" It is worthwhile to pause for a moment longer and let these Words from the book of Isaiah sink in. Obviously, Isaiah described the meaning of Jesus down to the last detail. These words were of such great importance that the treasurer from the East also stumbled at the exact point and asked: What is that supposed to mean and who is Isaiah talking about? It is still vitally important for us that we have this Jesus, who died on the cross for our sin, in mind. Perhaps at a time when we have noticed that we have not only become physically but also mentally ill, it is important to come back to this shepherd of souls who wants to heal us body and soul.

What Jesus wants here on earth is exactly that! He wants to heal us from our biggest problem. He wants to free us from our captivity through Satan and wants to carry away our sin. This is precisely why the Bible speaks repeatedly of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. The people for whom the first letter to Peter was written knew only too well what it meant to be slaves. For the most part, they were slaves. They knew what it meant to be in chains for life. Since birth we humans are like these slaves and have been chained to sin and cannot be freed from it. To be so caught up in sin is worse than sickness; it is also worse than living in a foreign country without a passport; it is even worse than death. Jesus not only frees us from our earthly worries. He buys us free from sin, from Satan and from death. That is why the disciples followed him from day one until today.

The first letter of Peter describes that we live on in Jesus' template. He says this because he also knows that we Christians not only have the Christ in front of us who gives us the script, but also the Christ in us. We live out of him and in Him! Through baptism, Jesus lives in us. We know that we belong to Him through the Holy Spirit. We belong to his family. Jesus has become flesh and blood, so that we are his family members and always want to be with Him. The path we follow in Jesus' footsteps is not our path. It is the way of Jesus himself. He is the good shepherd. We are the sheep. Some people feel offended that we Christians are compared to such sheep. Maybe because sheep look so stupid. However, the sheep cannot be completely stupid, because they have survived many other animals over the millennia. In fact, sheep are helpless. They have no sharp teeth to defend themselves; they cannot even run away quickly and most of the time they cannot even hide away. And yet they survived. Probably because they were smart enough to seek protection from the shepherd. We Christians are really as helpless as sheep: when someone does evil to us, we bless and to those who hate us we do good! One would think that no community can survive in such conditions. Indeed, Christians have been ridiculed, cheated, persecuted, imprisoned and tortured for over 2000 years. And yet these Christians still exist! Why? Because they're like sheep. They know where the good shepherd is who can protect them. Amen

