

**Fourth Sunday of Easter (c)**  
**Acts 9:36-43   Revelation 7:9-17   John 10:22-30**  
**St. John's Lutheran Church, Grove City OH**  
**May 8, 2022 [SATURDAY ONLY]**

Today's gospel, where Jesus speaks of himself as the good shepherd of the sheep, strangely, made me think of a particularly bad shopping experience I had years back. It was at one of the big box stores. I went to customer service to return a defective product. I was the only person there, but the young woman behind the counter wouldn't acknowledge me. She was busy on her computer screen. I tried to get her attention. She finally shot me this poisonous look. I was clearly putting her out. She finally came over and examined the toy carefully. I explained that the toy was broken when we opened the package. She was skeptical. Like she thought I had smashed it specifically to give her extra work that day. I was wondering...what could be causing such a bad attitude? Then I got the answer.

A door flew open from a little office in back, and her manager stomped out, went over to the computer screen, and he asked her accusingly, "Why aren't you getting this done?" She pointed over at me. And the manager, right in front of me, started laying into her about how much work he had to do that morning and how worthless his employees were.

And then, to my amazement, he grabbed the broken toy out of her hands and told her to get back to the computer. He voided out everything on the register that she had done with me, and put me through the whole return process again from the beginning, as if she had done everything wrong. So this guy clearly hated his work, showed contempt for his employees, and I'm pretty sure he hated his life. But he was the manager.

Now it all made sense. I knew then, why every time I was at that store, most the workers were either half zombie-like or outright nasty. Why they hid from customers. Why the checkout people regularly rolled their eyes and made sarcastic comments. Why the huge store was always so empty. In fact by the time we left that town, the store had closed.

Just a week or so later after that bad experience, I was sitting in waiting room in a dentist office. And I'm suddenly wondering, "why am I always happy when I'm here?" And I look around. The waiting room is packed with patients. This should be a recipe for impatience and frustration. But the workers behind the desk—it was a huge office—they were all smiling and happy and talking, and also super busy at the same time. And I noticed that all four of the dentists—the bosses—would, in the middle of all their work, stop and exchange greetings and pleasantries with their helpers.

It made me think back to my experience at the big store the week before. It was so funny: in the big store, where hardly anyone was shopping, everyone seemed overworked and put-upon and resentful; whereas in the jam-packed dentists' office, where the potential for frustration was ten times higher, you wouldn't think anyone was at work, they were enjoying it so much. And that atmosphere radiated out into the

waiting room and actually changed my attitude as a patient. It was contagious. Such a contrast!

I guess that was the first time I really understood the day-to-day, minute-to-minute, importance of the kind of management under which we live and work. Sometimes we think of our faith in God as something above everything—kind of separated from the everyday stuff we do. But the whole Bible is really about the management we live under as we go to the store, brush our teeth, raise our kids, work at the office, deal with people, every day. Looking to God as our manager, our shepherd, has a substantive effect, it changes the basic character of all these little things we do from day to day. In every situation, *who your boss is* makes all the difference. Those of you who have worked in toxic environments know it all too well. Everything about your job can be perfect on paper...on paper it can be your dream job, you can be making a great salary...but if you're working under a bad boss, there will be misery. And I like to think of it this way: all of scripture ultimately is written to tell us who the boss really is.

It doesn't matter what I say I worship; my god in this moment right now is whatever I'm depending on and answering to for my life. And as a Christian, I know that there is only one person I need to trust, love, respect, answer to, fear, and depend on: Jesus Christ. He is the good shepherd of the sheep, and the only rightful boss. And he is the Great Shepherd who lays down his life for us. He is God. He's the boss who, when I hear him calling me through his word, breaks through the power of the false gods that are always trying to enslave me in fear and misery and hopelessness. He exposes them for what they are. When I hear God's promise to me, and I trust it and live out of it, Jesus steps in to take the place of all those other gods. And I know that I'm free.

Everything depends on the character of the manager who manages us. Our Shepherd walks with us through the valley of death. He leads us beside the still waters, he prepares a feast for us at the table, and feeds us with his own life. We're living under new management.

We can show it in everything we do. For example, we might have the worst boss in the world at the office, which probably means we work with a bunch of unhappy, complaining, backstabbing coworkers. In that situation, the temptation is to blend in and mirror that miserable environment. As Christians, though, we are not here to reflect the environment in which we live and work. Most of the world is living under horrible management. Jesus came to expose Satan and break his stranglehold on people. It takes a lot of faith, it takes trust in God's promises, it takes a willing decision to love our coworkers and our bosses despite how difficult they might be. But we can reflect our new manager to them. We can and should respect our worldly bosses. We can love them as Jesus loves them. We can serve them as Jesus serves them. And we can do that, because we know it's not really them we're answering to!

That's the power Jesus gave us at his resurrection. He says, you're free now, you answer only to me, so love one another. Trust your Good Shepherd so much that you can lay down your life for other people without fear. Go out and set other people free. Tell them

the good news about the new management. Especially go to those people who are dealing with bad management right now. Tell them who the real manager is. Show them how free he has made you, with the way you love them and serve them.

Bad management is so all-pervasive in this world that sometimes the temptation to give in is very strong. Yes it would be easier to just make do with what we've got. Do the minimum, take our earnings home and keep watch over our stuff and protect ourselves all the time. Yes it takes courage to lay down our lives for others, to throw ourselves 100% into what we do so that others will be blessed abundantly. It takes courage that, frankly, we would not have, without being able to depend completely on our good manager. Our Savior, who defeated death.

And along with that, we know from Easter that this world's bad manager is going to get shut down. No matter how well he looks like he's doing, no matter how powerful he looks, he will be destroyed. We know whose shop is going to stay open forever. What a joy and a privilege it is, that even today, in the middle of this broken, messed up world, you and I can work for Him.