

Sermon for April 26, 2026 – Easter 4

Ezekiel 34:11-16a EHV

Theme: Jesus is our loving Shepherd-King

- 1) Who seeks after his scattered, scared sheep (11-13)
- 2) Who fulfills his promises and grants us peace (13-16)

¹¹ For this is what the LORD God says. Here I am. I myself will seek the welfare of my flock and carefully search for them. ¹² As a shepherd searches for his flock when his sheep that were with him have been scattered, so I will search for my flock and rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. ¹³ I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own soil. I will shepherd them on the mountains of Israel, in the valleys, and in all the settlements of the land. ¹⁴ I will lead them into good pasture, and their grazing land will be on the high mountains of Israel. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and they will pasture on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ I myself will shepherd my flock. I myself will let them lie down, declares the LORD God. ¹⁶ I will seek the lost. I will bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured. I will strengthen the weak.

Lightning flashes across a dark, churning sky, casting a sickly green hue on everything below. The air vibrates with a constant rumble, broken by crashes of thunder that rattle your bones. The wind roars like a freight train as hail pounds the earth, bending and breaking proud trees that have stood for decades.

No wonder that pets and children often hide when they sense a thunderstorm approaching, trembling with fear? Severe thunderstorms are terrifying.

And if that is true for us, who live in solid, secure houses, imagine how they affect animals living on the open prairie. They can't reason their way through it like us. All they see, hear, and feel is darkness and terror. Spooked animals can work themselves into such a frenzy that they break through fences and scatter, running far away to find any place that feels safe.

That's why, after a storm, a rancher must go out across the range, looking for his lost and straying animals, so He can gather and bring them back to safety.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, life has a way of hitting us like a thunderstorm. Illness, loss, economic anxiety, political turmoil, broken relationships, the relentless pressures of daily life, guilt over sin – the storms come in many forms, sometimes one right after the other. Perhaps you are in the middle of one right now, feeling shaken and asking: “How am I going to cope?”

Thankfully, we are not wild animals left to fend for ourselves. We, believers, belong to the LORD – the maker of heaven and earth – who commands and controls every storm. More than that, He is our Good Shepherd, who will stop at nothing to keep us safe.

With the prophet Ezekiel as our guide, let us consider these truths under the theme: **Jesus is our loving Shepherd-King**, 1) Who seeks after His sheep; 2) Who fulfills His promises and grants us peace.

Part One: Jesus is our loving Shepherd-King, who seeks after his scattered, scared sheep.

Our sermon text comes from a prophecy Ezekiel spoke to Judah in the middle of a terrible disaster. The “shepherds of Israel” – Israel’s political and spiritual leaders – had abused their authority and led the people into gross idolatry. Instead of caring for God’s flock, they let people stray from Him.

So the LORD sent the terrifying armies of Babylon as a storm of judgment upon His people to awaken in them a proper fear of Him. They besieged Jerusalem, executed many leaders, destroyed the temple, and carried the people off into exile.

If you think your present troubles are hard to bear, imagine what it would have been like to be a Jew in those days, facing war, famine, pestilence, complete financial ruin, and exile - all at the same time. Humanly speaking, they had every reason to despair.

Yet the LORD did not want to leave His people without hope. He loved them. The whole reason He sent the terror of Babylon was to punish the hardened among his people and awaken the rest from their spiritual apathy, so that they might repent.

For this reason, He commanded Ezekiel to proclaim:

¹¹ For this is what the LORD God says. Here I am. I myself will seek the welfare of my flock and carefully search for them. ¹² As a shepherd searches for his flock when his sheep that were with him have been scattered, so I will search for my flock and rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. ¹³ I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own soil.

Even when everything seemed irreparably lost, the LORD wanted His people to know that He had not abandoned them. Like a rancher going out after a storm, the LORD Himself would go out for His flock. He knew exactly how frightened they were. That was, in fact, the entire purpose of His storm: to wake them from their spiritual slumber, destroy their idolatry, and replace it with a reverent fear of Him.

He sent the storm of Babylon to lead them to repentance! And the storm did its work. Now came the time for gathering His frightened people. Despite their great sins, the LORD neither forgot nor forsook them. He treasured them so much that He Himself would gather them from all the nations where He had scattered them. He would re-establish them in the promised land in order to fulfil His promise of providing a Saviour for the world through them.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, like Israel of old, we too are God’s treasured people. He purchased us from all sin through the death of his Son. Through the proclamation of His Word, He called us

to repentance and faith. In Holy Baptism, He adopted us as His children. He reassures us of His love every time we partake of the Lord's Supper, giving us the very body and blood Jesus used to win our forgiveness.

We are God's dearly loved sheep, scattered throughout the world. But like God's people of old, we too are vulnerable to idolatry – not the worship of carved images or bronze statues, but the subtler idols that quietly capture our hearts.

For example, we are tempted to trust in worldly wealth, allowing our sense of security to rise and fall with the balance of our bank account instead of resting in God's promises. We are tempted to treat technological progress as a god, assuming that if we just become advanced enough, we can fix every problem ourselves. We are drawn to carnal pleasure, seeking comfort in what feels good to our flesh rather than in the LORD who truly satisfies. We are lured into making political allegiance an idol, speaking more passionately about our party's ideas or candidate than about our Saviour.

So what does our Shepherd do to call us back from such things? He allows storms to arise in our lives - earthly troubles designed to expose the emptiness of our idols and draw us back to Him. Illness, financial hardship, civic unrest, personal conflict, deep loneliness – none of these are pleasant. But the LORD uses them to remind us that all the things we're tempted to trust in apart from Him offer no lasting hope. They are worthless idols that cannot save.

For the unbelieving and unrepentant, such storms can be previews of the final judgement. But for God's children, these storms are fatherly discipline – crosses He allows us to bear, which He uses in love to draw us closer to Him. He uses the storms to terrify us away from the idols that entice us so that, through repentance and faith, we might have a proper, reverent fear of the LORD – looking to Him alone for help and salvation.

And just as the LORD promised to go out and gather ancient Israel after their storm, so He is even now coming to you through His Word to calm your troubled heart. He sees where you are. He understands your fears. He invites you to look past the storm to Him, your Shepherd.

Just as He has rescued every generation of believers before you, so He will come with His shepherding care to gather, heal, protect and prosper you as you turn to Him in repentance and faith. He can and will do this for you. How do we know? Because He promised it – right here in our sermon text.

Part Two: Jesus is our loving Shepherd-King, who fulfills his promises and grants us peace.

I will shepherd them on the mountains of Israel, in the valleys, and in all the settlements of the land. ¹⁴ I will lead them into good pasture, and their grazing land will be on the high mountains of Israel. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and they will pasture on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ I myself will shepherd my flock. I myself will let them lie down, declares the LORD God. ¹⁶ I will seek the lost. I will bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured. I will strengthen the weak.

The biblical books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther all record how the LORD kept these promises for His exiled people. He brought them back to the land of Canaan. He allowed them to rebuild the temple. He delivered them from enemies who tried to wipe them out. History vindicates God's faithfulness.

But their return from exile was only a partial, earthly fulfilment of Ezekiel's prophecy. Those events pointed ahead to a greater work God would accomplish through His promised Saviour, which is why Jesus deliberately laid claim to Ezekiel's prophecy when He declared:

¹⁴“I am the Good Shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me ¹⁵(just as the Father knows me and I know the Father). And I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶I also have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. Then there will be one flock and one shepherd.”ⁱ

Jesus does not merely compare Himself to a shepherd – He identifies Himself as the Shepherd of Ezekiel 34. The same LORD who promised to personally go out and gather His scattered people has now appeared in human flesh to do exactly that. Every promise the LORD made through Ezekiel, Jesus fulfills – not just in principle, but in His own body and blood, at His own cost.

So what are the “good grazing lands” and “rich pastures” to which our Shepherd-King leads us? They are not only a future heavenly reality. They begin here and now, in the Word and Sacraments of Christ's Church.

Picture a woman who has carried a crushing burden of guilt for years – sins she fears are too great, too persistent, too shameful for God to forgive. She sits in the pew, worn down by the weight of it. Then she hears the words of absolution spoken over her: “I forgive you all your sins, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

The Shepherd has found her. He has bound up her wound. He has granted her rest in the rich pasture of His Gospel.

Our Good Shepherd's voice is heard wherever the Gospel is proclaimed in its truth and purity. God's Church, gathered around His pure Gospel, is the “mountains of Israel” and the “settlements of the land” to which Jesus leads us today.

How does our Shepherd care for us now? Through His Church. As His Word is preached and His Sacraments are administered, the LORD Himself is at work, forgiving, healing, and strengthening our faith – offering us the peace we so desperately need.

Whenever you worry your sins are too great for God to love you, Jesus points you to His cross and says, “I paid for them in full.” Whenever you worry if you will have enough to survive, His Word reminds you that, just as He feeds the sparrows and clothes the lilies, so He will take care of you – for you are worth far more to Him than they.

Whenever you fear for your safety or that of your loved ones, God's Word recalls how He shielded His people in every generation. He tells you about His angels and reassures you that He is at work in all things – even the evil you experience - for your everlasting good.

And whenever you fear death, Jesus points you to His own empty tomb and His promise to raise you from the grave into the perfect paradise He will create when He returns in glory.

The Gospel in Word and Sacraments is how Jesus gets His forgiveness, comfort, and peace to you. Through these means, He rules over our hearts as King and shepherds us with such steadfast kindness that we need never be afraid.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, great storms will arise in your life. They always do. But remember: the One who allows those storms and controls them is also our faithful Shepherd King.

He invites you to find refuge in Him. He will never leave you nor forsake you. Once the storm passes, you will see clearly that He was caring for you all along.

So listen to His voice. Return to Him in repentance. In His Gospel, find the forgiveness, comfort, and relief your soul longs for.

Your Shepherd is ever faithful to His promises. In Him, you have everlasting peace. Amen.

John 10:14-16 EHV