

*Sermon for the Fourth Sunday of Easter, 10.iv.2005, 10:30 a.m.  
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle/Brogue, Pennsylvania  
Acts 2:42-47; Psalm 23; I Peter 2:19-25; John 10:1-10 [11-18]  
Holy Baptism for Grace Meiqiong Foresman  
Holy Communion, LBW - Setting 2*

**J. J. !**

Grace to you and peace from God Our Father and from Our  
Risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! ✠ Amen.

Our focus text is the continuation of today's Gospel from John,  
Chapter 10, beginning at the 11<sup>th</sup> verse:

*I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the Shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because the hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the Good Shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one Shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father. "*

*-- John 10:11-18*

*"I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So, there will be one flock, one Shepherd."* By Holy Baptism we are born into the flock of Christ. By the preaching of the Good News of our belonging safely to Christ the Good Shepherd we hear the Good Shepherd's voice all our lives and are reminded by the Holy Spirit not to wander from His sight. By

Holy Communion we receive food and drink to sustain us in the pastures of faith in this life so that we may belong to God forever. We know who *we* are, but who are these other sheep Our Lord mentions in today's Gospel?

At the service I led in the Lutheran Home at Shrewsbury this past Wednesday, I posed this question to the worshippers, most of them residents of the Lutheran Home, some for just a short time, others for years. I reminded them that, in all likelihood, *none* of them had spent their entire Christian life in that particular flock of Christ, the one that gathers in the Lutheran Home on Wednesdays with visiting pastors and laity and on Sundays with Chaplain George Minnick. No, they had all once belonged to other flocks, to many different Christian congregations, Lutheran congregations mostly, but probably not all of them. And yet, the Lord had brought them there in His goodness and care for them, gathering them now into one flock from many other folds, Christina men and women open to God's Word in Scripture and Sacrament and there to support one another to the best of their ability.

It is the ecumenical hope of the Church that this openness to being gathered out of our many divisions into one flock under the one Shepherd of the Church. How easy that is for nursing home residents, for people who have relatively few options left in this life. How difficult this seems to be for the rest of us, a puzzle that will perhaps be solved for us in eternity someday.

But those 'other sheep that do not belong to this fold' could also refer to humanity outside the visible circle of the Disciples, outside the House of Israel, into which all the Disciples had been born, and perhaps outside the visible community of the Church, could it not? The Apostle Paul hints at this in the way he honors the faith of the Athenians while proposing himself as a spokesman for 'the unknown god' to whom they had also erected a shrine, just to be on the safe side.

The Lutheran theologian, Rudolf Otto, thought about those 'other sheep' in just that sense. Early in the last century he was a great pioneer in trying to understand the great religions of the world as what he termed the "family of religions." As a very young and newly doctored scholar in the years just before World War I, he

sailed, trained, cycled and walked literally around the globe, determined to actually meet and observe as many people as he could in the act of worship and discourse about their faith.

For Rudolf Otto, Christianity and Judaism were clearly at the head of this 'family,' but each and all of the great wisdom traditions that had appealed to millions and had demonstrated staying power measured in the thousands of years shared a common element. This was what he called "the idea of the Holy," viz., awe, fascination, interest and the attempt to apply to life a reality that is infinitely good, infinitely powerful, infinitely sublime. A thousand years ago Saint Anselm of Canterbury had called this reality "that than which a greater cannot be thought . . . and this all people call 'God'." Rudolf Otto agreed with Anselm's hunch, that 'all people' have such an idea, even if it is a hope or an aspiration without words, the sense of a reality that is completely different from us and completely beyond us, that all people, all people who have ever lived and all people who will ever be born, have an inborn yearning for what we call 'God.' Could those 'other sheep' of Our Lord Jesus Christ not include, in particular and most specifically, *those* 'sheep' wandering here and

there and into certain danger and death without a shepherd and guide? I believe they *are* included, included in God's love in Jesus Christ, included in the care of the Good Shepherd Who wills to gather all humanity into one flock under One Shepherd.

And I believe that Grace Meiqiong Foresman is a special sign among us of that love and care of the Good Shepherd that extends to all humanity. Grace Meiqiong is an American, like us, and she is Chinese, a 'black-haired daughter of Han'—also *like us!* What? That's right. This little flock of Saint James Evangelical Lutheran Church into which she has been called by the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit Who acting through her parents' love, moving them to travel half way around the world to find her, this flock which was more ethnically diverse than one might think, but all European in some sense, is now *Chinese* also, now connected to one quarter of the world's population and to a culture over 4,000 years old. The government that has been in power in Grace Meiqiong's motherland for the last few decades thinks that there is no god and no wisdom greater than itself, but China is much older and wiser than that, and God Who is the Author of all wisdom and the Creator and Lord of all

the nations of the earth has infinite patience and infinite power. Someday, in God's good time and providence, all of the people of China will have the right to respond to God's love through a faith that is lived openly. But for now, we give thanks that Grace Meiqiong will have that right among us, her birthright through Holy Baptism as a child not only of her people, not only of her parents but of God most high. As we meet the peoples of the earth in her, as we become her family of faith over as many of her years as God will give us the grace to be part of her life, may we also meet in this child, daughter and sister of this congregation the breadth and the depth of the love of our Good Shepherd, Who laid down His life for *all*.

✠ Amen.

Now may Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God Our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word. ✠Amen.

**S. D. G. !**