

Sermon for the Christian Burial of Charles Elmer "Dick" Warner
★15.xii.1923 †28.iii.2007
Saint James the Apostle Evangelical Lutheran Church
Monday, 2.iv.07, 10:00 a.m.
Psalm 121, John 10:27-30

J. J.!

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

**"My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and
they follow me. I give them eternal life, and
they will never perish."**

-- John 10:27,28

It was a fateful year of Our Lord 1951, when Charles Elmer Warner, here, and I in far away Texas were both reborn children of God through our Baptism into Christ, I at five weeks after my birth and he not a minute too soon before his wedding, and who could have foreseen or known but God alone that our lives would intersect here, so that Elmer and I would be

members of the same congregation, he my parishioner and I his pastor. A rich weave is the fabric of this life, and in that richness we see in time a reflection of the depth of eternity. Elmer and I, not to mention his wife, Mabel, and daughters and grandchildren besides, were all called here by the voice of the same Shepherd, to be His flock and to remain His flock because He knows us and we recognize His voice, because we can tell the difference between the voice of Christ Our Lord and the voice of any other.

I first met Elmer here, at Saint James Church, visiting him later in York Hospital on several occasions and, later still, at home. That home visiting would have commenced many months earlier except for the fact that more than once, just when I had added

Elmer to my at home list, he would turn up at church for worship or some fellowship event. His trademark smile was enough to make others believe that, whatever might be amiss in Elmer's health, it really didn't amount to all that much. His smile was enough also to transform one's own worries into just so many bothers, nothing to fret about, really. Time would tell just how serious his health issues were, and Elmer was content to let time tell that tale, with no help from him. Contentment and peace went before Elmer and guided his way. He did not expect to achieve happiness by demanding it or to be content through striving. Peace came first, and all else followed.

Where did that peace come from, a peace that made of his home with Mabel a place from which neither children nor grandchildren like to be away for long? Part of it came from Elmer's work, very similar in some essential aspects to that of those good and faithful sheep and goat herders to whom Our Lord draws our attention in today's Gospel and elsewhere. Saying this, I must add that, as is true for my knowledge of most of the members in all of the congregations I have served, I regret not knowing Elmer doing what he did with most of his time to earn a living, for fifty-five years, to be exact. I do know of his joy and keen interest in that work, because it was something he always enjoyed talking about.

And, though I never observed Elmer at a 4:00 a.m. milking, or fretting over a cow in labor, or wondering whether to risk getting his arm broken restoring a prolapsed bovine uterus, or whether to call the vet and let him take that risk, or worrying with Mabel some seasons over who was supporting whom, the farmer or the farm, I do know that, as a dairyman, Elmer developed a bond with his animals based on trust and knowledge and dependability and kindness, a bond not unlike that between a shepherd and every member of his flock. I am sure that no voice or smell or manner was quite like Dick's as far as his cows were concerned, and I imagine that it must have been difficult to find a substitute when one was needed, for who could be trusted in that barn but Elmer, or

Mabel, or perhaps other members of the family? Knowing this, Elmer lived up to that standard of faithfulness and kindness, even if it meant being bound to the farm and the beautiful hills surrounding it, and he clearly valued that not as bondage but as the bond of freedom, as happiness found and lived each new day, days that once in a while even left time to spend with his beagles and hunting with them or watching a local baseball team play on a fine summer afternoon or evening.

A life lived in the rhythm of creation, as Elmer lived his life, also can get used to the Creator, in the way of dairy cows and dairymen, in the way of flocks and shepherds. The heart of that creation, and the heart and will of the Creator, had been opened to

Elmer through the preaching of the Good News that this world belongs to God and is being restored to God in Christ Jesus.

Sowing crops and reaping them, raising and feeding animals, caring for them decently and receiving from them the gift of food they return to us, working for the future of his marriage and his family and teaching joy and peace and reverence toward God and Church by precept and example, Elmer had spent such a wealth of years feeling the momentum of God's Holy Spirit, breathing life into the world with each sunrise, that he had come to know God's unfailing love as that which binds us to this life and in this life together for this time, certain that a time of fulfillment and harvest will come, and that it will be good

because God is good. May it be part of your remembrance and a consolation to you as you miss him now that he passed toward that moment with that unforgettable smile of peace and joy and contentment by which all knew him. Now you, who were such a large part of that joy, must see him with the eyes of faith and see him as he is, at home with his Lamb and Shepherd forever, smiling still, in that joy which is our hope. ✠ Amen.



Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, Our LORD. ✠ Amen.



S. D. G.!