Today is “Good Shepherd Sunday.” Every year on this Sunday in the Easter season we focus our attention on Jesus as our good shepherd. On this day every year our psalm is Psalm 23, “The LORD is my shepherd.” On this day every year the Holy Gospel is a portion of John 10, the chapter in which Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, and I lay down my life for the sheep.” Every year on this Sunday the other readings and our hymns also carry this theme of Jesus as our good shepherd. And so it is today. Thus our theme this morning: “Our Guiding, Guarding Good Shepherd.”

Jesus is our guiding and guarding good shepherd. We see this in our lessons today. And we see it in our life as well. And we will see our good shepherd guide and guard us as all the way home and for endless ages to come.

First of all, then, Jesus guides us. Listen to what he says in our Gospel reading today: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.” Dear fellow sheep, you are here to hear your shepherd’s voice. He calls you, and you follow him. Christ has called you out of the darkness and the depravity and the death of this world. Once you were not part of his flock, but now you are. Jesus has called you from death to life. He did this by dying the death that you deserve because of your sins. You were lost, trapped in the thicket of the devil, the world, and your own sinful flesh. But your shepherd came and rescued you. He pulled you out when you were ensnared in the devil’s clutches. Jesus put you on his shoulders and carried you,

much as he carried that cross and bore your sins when he died in your place, winning your

forgiveness. As we just sang: “Perverse and foolish oft I strayed, but yet in love He sought me and on His shoulder gently laid and home rejoicing brought me.”

Thanks be to God! We would have no shepherd at all if not for what Jesus has done for us! We would be lost, cut off from God, vulnerable, in grave danger, if Jesus had not found us and done the only thing that would save us: He laid down his life for the sheep. He laid it down, and he took it up again, in his mighty resurrection. And with that, Jesus has called us from death to life. He called us by name in our baptism. And he put God’s name upon us, the name of the triune God, to mark us as those belonging to God’s flock, God’s sheepfold. We are his, and we have Jesus now as our good shepherd. That makes all the difference.

And so now Jesus is guiding us. “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” And this is where you hear his voice, here in his church, where his word is preached and taught and sacramented. Listen to his voice speaking to you. You hear it when Christ’s undershepherd declares to you: “In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins.” You hear our Lord’s voice when he says: “Take, eat. Take, drink. This is my body, this is my blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.” Here is where Jesus’ voice can be heard. “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” Here is where Jesus’ voice is giving you guidance for daily life, leading you in the paths of righteousness. Here is where Jesus’ voice is giving you hope for your future, even in the midst of danger and evil all around. “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”

Notice that: Not only does our good shepherd guide us, he also guards us. That rod that the shepherd carries–he uses it to ward off predators who would attack the sheep. He guards and defends the sheep from all the enemies who would harm them. So it is with Jesus and us, his sheep. He protects us from our enemies and the dangers that we face.

This includes the spiritual danger of false teachers and their false teaching. And again, Jesus will do this through his undershepherds. Notice how Paul brings that out in his address to the Ephesian elders: “Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”

A faithful shepherd–and the word “pastor” means “shepherd”–a faithful shepherd is sent by Christ to do this for you: to lead you into the green pastures of God’s word, so that you may safely graze there and be fed and nourished. The pastor does this by declaring to you the whole counsel of God, so that you are firmly grounded in the Scriptures, growing in your knowledge of the truth, mature in the faith.

And then the flip side of this is to guard you against error. There are always false teachers and false teachings floating around, which could draw you away from the truth. The shepherd needs to stand guard and to warn you against following after such seductive teaching, for that is what it often is: seductive. The false teachers can sound so appealing, so nice to listen to; they tell us what we want to hear. That would describe false teachers like Joyce Meyer and Joel Osteen. They often take a little grain of truth and bake a tasty cake of error around the little grain of truth. They take passages of the Bible out of context and patch them together to come up with their appealing errors. They leave out the passages that don’t fit their system. So in this way the sheep could be lured away and led astray. But Christ the good shepherd has given you a pastor to guard you against that. Your pastor is trained to teach the truth and refute the error. Take advantage of that. Jesus your good shepherd is guarding you in this way.

Jesus is our guarding and guiding good shepherd. He is committed to getting you safely home. And this is what that will look like. See what John sees in our reading from Revelation today: “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

The guarding time will be over. We will have come out of the great tribulation, all the trouble we face in this fallen and often hostile world. No more enemies to oppress us and attack us. Safe at home, finally, at last. Gathered in the presence of God. Jesus as our shepherd, still. Still leading us and guiding us. Notice, the Lamb will be our shepherd. Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world–Christ, the Lamb who was slain, now seated on his throne–he will shepherd and guide us to those springs of living water. No more thirst, no more hunger, no more danger. And no more tears either, friends. All that will be put behind us. Only life and joy ahead of us.

Jesus, our guiding and guarding good shepherd, is leading us there even now. Do you hear your shepherd’s voce? “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”