Voice of the Shepherd in the Midst of the City
Fr. Herman Homily - May 31, 2026

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Christ is among us. >> He is and ever shall be.

This Gospel reading this morning is taken from the Gospel of John, the latter part, the last several verses. The title of this sermon today is the "Voice of the Shepherd in the Midst of the City." In this Gospel, John 7:37-52; 8:12, Christ stands in the temple in the city, during the feast of Booths. In Hebrew, this is called חג הסכות (sukkot). And in this at this event, he cries out with a loud voice. Now those who know the scriptures understand that this feast of Booths, חג הסכות (sukkot), was the primary remembrance of the wilderness wanderings where the people were outside the city. There was only a shepherd and only his sheep which followed him. This is the time when Israel lived in tents, stripped of the false security of city walls and the Egyptian granaries and dependent entirely on the instruction of God, the Word of God, the Torah, the Voice of the Shepherd. Now the temple elite at the time of Jesus had turned this Feast of Booths into a static ritual of water libations and the lighting of massive candelabra, effectively taming and controlling the memory of the desert. By standing in the center of this religious machinery and claiming to be the living water and the light, Jesus is performing a prophetic act of iconoclasm. He is asserting that the temple and its rituals have become a tomb if they do not lead to the hearing of the Word of God. Jesus is the source of life in the Gospel, not because of a biological or mystical essence, but because He is the only faithful hearer and speaker of the Father's commandment in a world of human beings who are deaf.

In this sermon, I would like to highlight three aspects. **First**, the spirit is the breath of the proclaimed Word. Number **two**, the judgment of the Word. The judgment brings about division and schism. And **three**, the light is the instruction of the Torah of the new Exodus.

The spirit is the breath of the proclaimed word. Jesus cries out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink." In the school of the prophets, in the school of the Old Testament, thirst is never a mere psychological longing or a spiritual void. It is the dire lack of the Word of God. As Amos chapter 8 verse 11 tells us, and to drink is a functional verb in scripture. It means to submit to the λόγος (lógos) or דָּבָר

(davar) to the λόγος (lógos) to the Word of the shepherd in the wilderness and allow it to determine one's path one's journey. Now John explains that the spirit was not yet given because Jesus was not yet glorified. Now understand and be clear about this that the glory of Christ is not a radiant light show. It is the cross which for the world is darkness. But we're dealing with God after all. And his ways are not our ways. And his thoughts are not our thoughts. And the spirit, the πνεύμα (pnévma), is the breath that carries the Word of the cross into the ears of the world. The living water flows from the side of the crucified one because the cross is the ultimate concrete...amen...to the Father's will.

We do not receive this Holy Spirit through spirituality or internal meditation, but by being struck by the apostolic proclamation of the King who reigns from a tree. Brothers and sisters, we must not seek spiritual experiences that bypass the hard external demands of the Gospel. The Holy Spirit is not a vague energy designed to validate your inner self. The spirit is the power of the Word that shatters and destroys the inner self to conform you to the image of the crucified Christ. If we thirst for life, we should NOT look within our heart, which the modern world constantly talks about. Search your hearts. <u>This is biblical nonsense</u>! The prophets call the heart "deceitful" above all things. But we should look to the scriptures instead, to the teaching.

Now to drink is to hear the Word and execute it, to do it, to live it, to practice it.

And there is no spirit of God present where the Word of the cross is not being proclaimed and obeyed. Now because this word is not a human suggestion or a religious option but the definitive commandment of the creator, it cannot be heard and must not be heard neutrally. It acts as a cosmic divider. Immediately creating schism and division among among all those who encounter it.

Which leads to the **second** point that the judgment of the word causes this division. The text says the Word created a division among the people as schism. Now this is the primary function of the Gospel. In fact, the Gospel is a sword that separates the sheep from the goats. Now the authorities, the Pharisees, the chief priests reject Jesus because they have turned the law into a system of merit and ethnic markings, boundary markings, that they control. <u>They use the scripture as a map to protect their social and religious status</u>. But notice in the text that even the officers sent to arrest him are paralyzed and report back to the leaders. <u>No man ever spoke like this man</u>! They recognize the Authority, the εξουσία (exousía) of the Voice of the shepherd. And for a split moment, at least, these soldiers

are in the wilderness with Moses and the people and not in the city and certainly not in Jerusalem. This is a Voice that does not argue from human tradition but Speaks with the weight of the Creator. This division is between those who on the one hand know, the proud, the religious elite who think they own the truth and those who hear, that is the simple people, simply who hear the shepherd's voice and follow it.

We should be wary of our own heresies.

The tendency to use our theological knowledge, our orthodoxy as a shield to protect us from the actual demands of God's Word. The Gospel is not a tool for us to manage our heritage or to preserve it. It is the Judge that manages us. Do not measure the truth of a message by its popularity, its relevance, or how well it fits your political or social systems. The Pharisees had the correct scholarship. They had the correct position, yet they were blind. The question for us is never does this fit my tradition, but is this the Voice of the Shepherd calling me to die to myself?

This division that took place reveals those who are walking in the darkness of human wisdom and those who are following the true light of the new Exodus, the light of the new Moses, leading not from the slavery of Egypt to the promised land, but from the wasteland of this world into the Kingdom of Heaven. Leading us out of it into the very kingdom of God.

Now, **finally**, this light is the instruction. It's the Torah of this new Exodus. It's the voice of the shepherd leading us through the wilderness. When Jesus says, "I am the light of the world," he is standing in the section of the temple called the “Court of the Women.” This is where the women congregated where the great lamps were there. And these lamps recalled the “pillar of fire” that led the people through the wilderness. Now that fire was not for enlightenment or for some inner peace. It was a tactical guide for movement in the desert. To follow the light is to walk the path of the commandments in the midst of a hostile wilderness.

Christ is the light because he is the only human being who perfectly fulfills the law of the Father holding nothing back. He is the Torah made flesh! And that's what John means when it says in chapter 1 verse14, the λόγος (lógos) became flesh. He means the Torah became flesh.

What does it look like to follow God all the way according to the law of Moses and the prophets?

Look to Jesus and you will know what it looks like.

Now, this darkness is not just immorality. It is the darkness of human wisdom that is spoken of, philosophy, the traditions of men that obscure the clear commandment of God. Now to have the light of life is to be led out of the city, the system of human power and self justification and back into the wilderness, the place of total moment by moment dependent on God's Word. And when you say the Lord's prayer, you should be in the desert. Notice what the text says to you. Hear the words that you pray. "Give us this day our DAILY bread," not the bread you have stored up because you're in the wilderness. Now, to walk in the light is to live a life of concrete, visible obedience to the Gospel regardless of the cost to your reputation or your security.

The darkness of this age is the pervasive belief that we can save ourselves through technology, political alignment or religious ritual. All of these are idols and must be rejected for you cannot serve two masters. You will either love the one and despise the other or be to devoted to the one and hate the other.

To follow Christ is to take up the cross, the only lamp the Christian possesses, the only flag that should be waved and walk the path he has tried. Read the law and the Prophets, the sacred text of scripture, not as ancient history, but as the living instruction of your Commander, your Shepherd, your Leader, and you will find the only path that leads to the shadow of death into life. By following this light, we are not merely adopting a new set of ideas, a new agenda, a new narrative, but are being transformed from the kingdom of human darkness into the Light of the world to come, which is the only Light there is.

And in fact, it is spread upon the earth right now, but men and women do not see it.

Today Christ is standing in the midst of His church not as an historical memory or a spiritual idea but as the living breathing voice of the Father. He still calls the thirsty today to abandon their broken systems and to drink from the Word of the Cross. He still creates schisms in this world, exposing the hollow pride of the learned and the intelligent and gives life and light to those who simply hear and obey his teaching. And he still shines the only pillar of fire that leads us through the wilderness of this world; the only fire that can guide us through the collapse of human institutions and the wilderness of this life.

Now in this message we have seen that the spirit is the breath of the proclaimed

Word flowing from the Cross. The Word of Christ is the judgment that divides the “hearer” from the “knower”. And the light of Christ is the functional instruction for the new exodus from this world to the next which is approaching rather rapidly. So do not seek life in the systems of human beings or the spirituality of the self. And do not fear the division truth creates in your families or your society. After all, the Lord says if you do not hate your mother, brother, sister, father, and kindred and embrace the Gospel, you cannot be saved.

Now do not wander back into the darkness of your own common sense. Follow the voice of the shepherd. For He alone speaks the word of the father and his Word alone is the life of the world. May we embrace this word here in Lewes, Delaware at St. Andrews Orthodox Church.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Help us, save us, have mercy upon us, and keep us, oh God, by thy grace

Link to Sermon - https://youtu.be/mf_N517Ps3M?t=4887