

JESUS IS THE DOOR FOR THE SHEEP**Sermon for the 4th Sunday of Easter 2020 (Good Shepherd Sunday)****John 10:1-10**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Gospel from before, John 10:1-10: ¹ **“Truly, truly, I tell you, the man who does not come into the sheepfold through the door but climbs over somewhere else is a thief and a robber. ² However, the One who comes in through the door is the Shepherd of the sheep. ³ The doorkeeper opens the door for Him, and the sheep listen to His voice. He calls His own sheep by name and leads them out.**

⁴ **“When He brings out all His own sheep, He walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow Him because they know His voice. ⁵ They will not follow a stranger but will run away from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.”**

⁶ **Jesus told them this dark saying, but they did not understand what He was telling them. ⁷ Therefore, Jesus spoke again: “Truly, truly, I tell you, I am the Door for the sheep. ⁸ All who have come before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. ⁹ I am the Door. If anyone comes in through Me, he will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy. I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly.”**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Perhaps you can recall that the Gospel for the fourth Sunday in Lent related the story of a man who had been blind from birth, and how this man had received his sight from Jesus. You may recall that this sign caused a great deal of controversy because Jesus gave sight to this man on the Sabbath, which, according to some of the religious leaders, had violated the regulations against working on the Sabbath. These leaders called the man into their presence, interrogated him, hurled insults at him, and eventually threw him out of the synagogue. At the end of that reading, Jesus declared that while the Pharisees could see with their physical eyes, they were blind spiritually.¹

Today, we hear what happened next. Jesus continued teaching. Among His listeners was the man who had been blind, some Pharisees, His disciples, and others.

Jesus told them some fundamental earthly truths that have a heavenly meaning. It was not a parable that Jesus spoke, but rather, His words were a figure of speech. Jesus made some reasonably obvious observations about sheep, shepherds, thieves, and robbers. Then He applied these earthly observations to our spiritual condition.

To understand today's Gospel, it is helpful to know that sheep were kept of a night-time in a stone-walled, open-air pen with only one entrance, and was shared by several shepherds with their flocks. At the end of the day, the shepherds would bring their flocks into this enclosure and take turns keeping watch over their flocks by night. Then, in the morning, the shepherds would call their sheep out of the sheepfold and lead them to still water and green pastures. The sheep recognised the shepherd's voice as he called them by name and led them out - the shepherd knew each of his sheep by name.

Of course, the words of Jesus when He said, **“the man who does not come into the sheepfold through the door but climbs over somewhere else is a thief and a robber”** are self-explanatory. People who entered the sheepfold by climbing over the wall were up to no good. Such a man was either a thief who meant to steal what did not belong to him, or a robber who would obtain by violence what belonged to another.

Obviously, people who have legitimate business in the sheepfold entered through the door, but the question is, “What was Jesus' meaning from a heavenly viewpoint?” Who do the sheep represent? Who do the thieves and robbers represent, and who are the shepherds?

¹ John 9:1-41

Some of the sheep were among those who had listened to Jesus on that day – the man who had been blind, Jesus’ disciples, and others. The Pharisees were the thieves and robbers – people who *pretended* to be part of the church, but, in fact, led people away from the true church. Of course, Jesus Himself is the Shepherd who “**calls His own sheep by name and leads them out.**”

If the Pharisees are among the company of thieves and robbers who enter the church by illegitimate means, how is this so? The Pharisees taught that salvation could be obtained from obedience to the Law of Moses. Their teaching was one example of the many religions of the world today that all have that one fatal flaw, and that is that the religions of this world teach that *people are responsible for their own salvation.*

Ultimately, all false religions look for salvation within the individual. Many, like the Pharisees, have a code of ethics that a person must follow in order to obtain salvation – the Law of Moses for the Jews, the Five Pillars of Islam, the Book of Mormon, and many others. Others look for salvation through their own inner light, following their heart, letting their conscience be their guide, and so forth. Still, others say, “*It doesn’t really make any difference as long as you pick a good set of moral guidelines and do your best to live by them; everything will work out.*” Most of these teachings sound quite reasonable to man’s way of thinking, but Jesus tells us that they are all thieves and robbers intent on our destruction.

The simple fact is that anytime we take responsibility for all or even some small fraction of our salvation, we shall lose. That is the reason that Jesus compares us to sheep. In fact, the Bible compares us to sheep in many places. Here are a few examples: Psalm 119:176 reads, “*I have gone astray like a lost sheep.*” Isaiah says, “*We have all gone astray, like sheep. Each one of us has turned to his own way*” (53:6). Jeremiah writes, “*My people have become lost sheep*” (50:6). We heard Peter say today from our Second Reading, “*For you were like sheep going astray...*” (2:25). Using sheep as an example of man’s waywardness is perfect, because, if you ask anyone who raises sheep, they will tell you that if you give sheep an opportunity to make trouble, they will take it. Since we are so much like sheep, it is simply impossible for us to maintain the perfection that even the smallest fraction of salvation must have. Jesus said, “*Therefore, you shall be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect!*” (Matthew 5:48).

Therefore anyone who asks us to do anything to earn our own salvation is asking us to do the *impossible*. They are trying to set us up for the fall. They are one of the thieves or robbers who want to steal us away from God and destroy us.

Jesus said, “**Truly, truly, I tell you, I am the Door for the sheep.**” With these words, Jesus is telling us how to know false teachers. All true teachers focus on Jesus – the door. With Paul, they say, “*For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified*” (1 Corinthians 2:2).

False teachers do not enter through Jesus – the Door. They say things like, “*Everybody knows that Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins. Enough already! Let’s move on to the other teachings of the Bible.*” They want us to forget that all the teachings in the Bible have their source, their foundation, in who Jesus Christ is and what He has accomplished to save us from our sins.

The simplest way to test anyone who wants to teach us about salvation is to ask, “*What does this teacher say about Jesus?*” Does this teacher enter the sheepfold through Jesus, or does he climb over the wall? Is Jesus true God, Son of the Father from eternity? Is Jesus true man born of the Virgin Mary? Is our salvation free to us by means of the price Jesus paid on the cross? Is our resurrection assured by the resurrection of Jesus Christ? Is salvation in God alone with no contribution on our part? When Paul and Silas visited Berea they went up to the synagogue to teach, and the Bereans “*received the Word with all eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if these things were so*” (Acts 17:11). They compared what Paul and Silas taught with what the Scriptures taught. We too, ought to do the same because **the man who does not come into the sheepfold through the door but climbs over somewhere else is a thief and a robber.**

Jesus has a different path to salvation for us. When it comes to our salvation, He does ALL the work. Jesus has purchased salvation for us with His holy life, His innocent suffering, and His sacrificial death. We are His lambs, for He has bought us at a heavy price – His suffering and death on the cross.

He is the One who calls us by name as the Holy Spirit works faith in us through the Word – when we hear the Word and read it – when we feel the Word as it is combined with the water of baptism – when we taste and smell the Word in communion with the bread and wine of the Lord’s Table. Jesus Christ is the true Good Shepherd who **calls His own sheep by name and leads them out.**

Jesus has paid the ultimate price for us. He has suffered the wrath of God against each and every one of our sins. Our salvation cost Jesus everything, but it costs us nothing. Jesus gives this precious salvation to us as a free gift.

Since we are His lambs, He leads us on the path of everlasting life. We know this because He has risen from the dead. So also, the day will come when the Lord will raise all people from the dead. On that day, all those who believe in Jesus will be united body and soul in the eternal joys of heaven. In that place, false teachers will never again tell us that we must make some kind of contribution to our own salvation. We shall be free from their harassment.

In today's Gospel, Jesus warns us against spiritual thieves and robbers. It is bad enough that con-artists use sweet words to empty the bank accounts of others. It is even worse when spiritual con-artists use sweet words to empty heavenly accounts of God's grace and replace it with our worthless human effort.

Jesus Christ has called each of us by name.² We are His lambs purchased at a very heavy cost. He is the only way of salvation to which all true shepherds will point to – He is our one Good Shepherd, the One who leads and takes care of us in this life, and the One who ultimately will bring us safely home to the sheepfold of heaven. To Him be all glory and honour for evermore. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Lord our God, we praise You for Your great goodness; and for the good things that You have prepared for those who love You! Grant that we may obtain those glories, which no human being has ever seen or heard or ever thought could happen, through Jesus Christ, Your holy Servant.

We thank You for sending Christ, the Good Shepherd, into our world, to lay down His life for the sheep, to pay the price of His blood to free us from the power of Satan, from the deserved results of our sins, and from the lifelong fear of death. We praise You also for His triumphant resurrection, and for the glorious promise that all who listen to His voice and follow Him will receive eternal life.

We thank You for His pity and love for us, who were straying and helpless like sheep without a shepherd, but who are now through Your great mercy brought back to fellowship with the true Shepherd and Keeper of our souls. We thank You For Your gracious forgiveness for all our sins, for Your promise of peace, for Your assurance of salvation, for Your presence and power in our lives, and for every gift in Christ Jesus.

Enable us, by Your grace, to follow the example of Jesus, our Saviour and Head, by seeking the lost, lifting up the fallen, strengthening the weary, rescuing the straying, feeding the poor, helping the suffering, sheltering the homeless, and being sensitive to each other's needs. May we thereby proclaim Your praises for calling us out of darkness into Your marvellous light.

Give us the voice and leadership of Jesus the Good Shepherd in all parliaments and councils of the nations, in commerce and industry, in all civic and social life. Continue to give us patience as we wait out the lifting of social distancing restrictions. When the time comes that we are able to meet together in Your house, may we do so with much joy and thanksgiving, that You have considered us worthy to enter into Your presence.

Direct our way through the sin, strife, and uncertainty of this age, O Lord. Give us true faith and godly hearts. Strengthen the sick, cheer the depressed, and supply the needy, showing that You are always ready to help in every trouble.

Dear Lord, the earth is once again showing signs of dryness, so please send refreshing rain upon the land to refresh and revive Your creation.

Because our eyes have seen Your salvation, when our last hour comes, release Your servants in peace, and receive us into everlasting glory; through Jesus Christ Your Son, our risen Lord and Saviour. Amen.

² Isaiah 43:1

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 2:42-47

⁴² They continued steadfastly in the teaching of the apostles and in the fellowship, in the breaking of the bread and in the prayers. ⁴³ Fear came on everyone, and many wonders and miraculous signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and shared everything with one another. ⁴⁵ They used to sell their possessions and goods and divide them among them all, as anyone was in need. ⁴⁶ All were one at heart as they continued to go to the Temple every day. They used to break bread from house to house and eat their food with glad and generous hearts. ⁴⁷ They kept praising God and had the good will of all the people. Every day the Lord kept adding together those who were being saved.

1 Peter 2:19-25

¹⁹ For this is a commendable thing, if someone is moved by his conscience toward God, to bear the pain patiently when he suffers unjustly. ²⁰ For what credit is there if you are beaten for doing wrong and you patiently endure it? However, if you suffer for doing good and endure it patiently, this is commendable with God. ²¹ For God has called you for this purpose, because Christ also has suffered for you and has left you an example, that you may follow in His footsteps. ²² He did not commit any sin, and no deceit was found in His mouth. ²³ When others insulted Him, He did not insult them in return. When He suffered, He did not make threats but handed it over to Him who judges justly. ²⁴ He Himself carried our sins in His body to the cross, that we might die to sins and live to righteousness. By His wounds you were healed. ²⁵ For you were like sheep going astray but now have returned to the Shepherd and Caretaker of your souls.

John 10:1-10

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