

April 30, 2023
Fourth Sunday of Easter
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

John 10:1-10 (1 Peter 2:19-25)

JESUS IS THE GOOD SHEPHERD

(Portions adapted from “Sermons of Martin Luther,” vol. 3, Lenker, p. 382-394)

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

By now you have likely picked up on the theme of the day. Today is Good Shepherd Sunday. All of our Propers and hymns incorporate shepherd imagery to point us to Christ Jesus, our Good Shepherd. Regarding our Gospel text this morning, Martin Luther once said that Jesus is teaching us a parable of the three different types of preachers and their teachings in the Christian Church so that we may correctly determine which are the true teachings of the Holy Spirit. Three different teachings – but only one of the three one can save your soul unto eternal life.

The first type of teaching comes from those whom Jesus calls thieves and robbers. (cf: John 10:1) These are the preachers who are wolves dressed in sheep’s clothing who climb over fences into the sheepfold to deceive and steal the sheep. Jesus is referring to the false teachers of His day and of ours. Outwardly they appear to be good and faithful, but they attempt to impersonate the voice of the Good Shepherd. And they impersonate with poisonous and deadly teachings, preaching cleverly devised myths and doctrines of human tradition and wisdom that appeal to the passions of the sinful human nature. These teachings destroy your soul and end in eternal damnation.

There are too many of these deceptive teachings to name – but at the root is always the words of the crafty serpent in the Garden of Eden asking:

“Did God actually say...” (Genesis 3:1)

Then comes the outright denial of the authority of God’s Word.

As Missouri Lutheran Christians, we believe, teach, and confess that God’s Word as recorded in Holy Scripture is God’s very own divinely inspired, inerrant, and authoritative Word. It does not simply contain ***some*** of God’s Word – but it is ***all*** God’s Word in Law and Gospel. Not just the parts of Bible that you agree with or those parts that make you feel good. No. Every jot and tittle, every dot and iota of the Bible ***is*** God’s authoritative Word. (cf: 2 Timothy 3:15; 2 Peter 1:20)

It is by the power of the Holy Spirit working through God’s Word and Sacraments that your Good Shepherd makes you lie down in green pastures, leads you beside still waters, restores your soul, and leads you in paths of righteousness for His name’s sake bestowing upon you faith,

forgiveness of sins, and eternal salvation. Through Word and Sacrament, He guides and comforts you through this present valley of the shadow of death, strengthening you in times of adversity. He does not give His blessings only once but His goodness and mercy are continually given to all who believe – not only in this life but in the life to come. (cf: Psalm 23:1–6)

Thieves and robbers say that the Bible was written by ancient and primitive people and has no value to modern people. They say the Bible is on the wrong side of history. They say the Bible is full of misogyny, bigotry, prejudice, and injustice – so you should take what seems fair and useful and throw the rest out the window. St Paul writes that:

“... such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.” (Romans 16:18)

The truth is – God Word is the voice of the Good Shepherd. You hear the voice of the Shepherd in the proclamation of His Gospel. You hear the voice of the Shepherd in God’s Word wrapped in the waters of Holy Baptism. You hear the voice of the Shepherd in God’s Word wrapped in humble bread and wine in the Sacrament of the Altar.

God’s Word is not a like smorgasbord or buffet where you pick and choose which parts you want and forget the rest. No. God’s Word recorded in the Bible is the whole council of God. (cf: Acts 20:27) It is sufficient to make you wise unto salvation, training you to live a Christian life before God and your neighbor. (cf: 2 Timothy 3:15–17)

The second type of teaching comes from preachers who do not oppose Christ, but distort God’s Word so that the people trust in themselves for salvation through their own works and deeds. These preachers are thieves and robbers like the first group. To be a true preacher in the Office of the Holy Ministry, the preacher must be a ***gatekeeper*** for the Good Shepherd, keeping the sheep in shelter and safety, not allowing strangers to break in to murder, rob, and steal – and opening the door so that the Shepherd may enter in.

“The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.” (John 10:3)

Being a gatekeeper isn’t for the faint of heart. In his epistle letter St James writes:

“Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. ² For we all stumble in many ways...” (James 3:1–2)

This is most certainly true. I stumble in many ways. I am no more perfect and holy than anyone else gathered here this morning. Like you, I depend on the Shepherd to feed me:

“... by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” (Matthew 4:4)

Yet, for the sake of good order in the church, I have been called into the Office. (cf: 1 Corinthians 14:33)

And here is the warning for gatekeeper and sheep alike: any parish pastor who ***does not*** rightly divide Law and Gospel, does not purely proclaim the Gospel, and ***does not*** preach Christ crucified and risen for the forgiveness of ***your*** sins, life, and salvation, is no better than a thief and a robber. Any pastor who allows you to trust in your own works, reason, and strength rather

than trust in Christ alone – that man is no better than a thief and a robber. He is a hinderance to the Gospel and restrains the sheep from coming to Christ. He will be judged accordingly.

The faithful gatekeeper and pastor is nothing more a servant of the true Shepherd, Christ Jesus – who is Himself *the third type of Preacher and Teacher*. The gatekeeper has no power of his own. He can neither create faith nor grant salvation by his own accord. Our Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit does all the work. The gatekeeper is merely the servant of the Shepherd who warns the sheep of thieves and robbers and their false and deceptive teachings. The gatekeeper *does not* proclaim his own word but the Word of the true Shepherd, providing the place and opening the door for the true Shepherd in the preaching the Law, calling you to repentance – and then – pointing you to Christ who alone can sooth your sin-sick soul with His Holy Gospel to save you from sin and death. The gatekeeper opens the door for the true Shepherd in faithful preaching and teaching where Christ feeds His sheep in Word and Sacrament granting His gracious gifts of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. (cf: Luke 10:16; John 10: 4, 21:15–17) For the true Shepherd alone can lead the sheep to green pastures, beside still waters, restoring their souls, and leading them in paths of righteousness for His Name’s sake. (cf: John 10:3; Psalm 23:2–3)

The gatekeeper pastor also reminds the sheep that God’s Law and good works toward your neighbor are His good and gracious will for your life. Even though you cannot keep His Commandments Law perfectly – and – knowing that your works and deeds merits you neither forgiveness nor salvation, God still requires you to do your best. Being renewed by the Holy Spirit, the Christian is obligated to do good works. (cf: FC Ep, iv, 8) You are to keep the Law – but not trust in it. Faith in Christ alone will keep and comfort you in His pasture.

Jesus says:

“I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” (John 10:10)

Of all the sayings and promises of Jesus, perhaps this one is the most misunderstood and abused. Prosperity preachers use it to say that Jesus will make you healthy and wealthy if you name it and claim it. But Jesus’ words here are not about having an abundance of treasures and toys or an abundance of happiness and lack of sorrow in this life. Apart from the crucified and risen Christ, there is no salvation or eternal life. Eternal life in Christ is received and possessed by faith. Eternal life is, therefore, not only a future gift but also the life now given and present in the act of believing. It is knowing and trusting the true God and Christ Jesus Christ whom He has sent in this life – and then on the Last Day He:

“... will transform [y]our lowly body to be like his glorious body...” (Philippians 3:20–21)

... to live with Him in His eternal Kingdom forever.

Jesus says:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.” (John 10:7)

Jesus, Himself, and He alone, is *both* the true Good Shepherd – and – He is *also* the Door – the Door, referencing the preaching of His Word and administration of His Sacraments though which He comes to you and makes Himself known. Just as a first century Middle Eastern shepherd cared and tended his flock, Christ Jesus cares and tends for you in His Word and

Sacraments. By the power of the Holy Spirit working through these means, the true Shepherd guides and leads, feeds and keeps you in this life and the life to come.

When you remain in the true Shepherd, like newborn lambs, you daily grow to know His voice in knowledge and faith. You are strengthened to endure trials and tribulations all while bearing fruits of faith: teaching, serving and helping others in acts of compassion and good works and deeds.

Perhaps you are insulted by being called a sheep. And it is true, much can be said about the lack of intelligence and defensive capabilities of a sheep. But our Creator gave sheep a special trait: their hearing. For all the sheep lack in other talents, they have discerning ears. They are sensitive to subtle differences in sound, allowing them to identify the calls of other sheep and the presence of predators. They recognize their shepherd's voice while discriminating against all others who pose as shepherds.

The Lord is your Good Shepherd. You shall not be in want. In Christ you have abundant life right now whether it looks like it or not. When the Shepherd speaks through His Word, the door is opened and you hear His voice, freeing you from the fear and terror of sickness and death in this life, comforting you so that you look to God in Christ for grace and comfort.

"[Jesus is] *the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*" (John 10:11)

***"²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. ²⁵ For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."* (1 Peter 2:24–25)**

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Amen.

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