

John 10:1-10  
“The Door of the Sheep”  
Fourth Sunday of Easter

May 3, 2020  
First Lutheran Church, Glencoe, Minn.  
Pastor Peter Adelsen

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

Let us pray:

*Here [Christ Jesus] our true Paschal Lamb we see,  
Whom God so freely gave us;  
He died on the accursèd tree—  
So strong His love—to save us.  
See, His blood now marks our **door**;  
Faith points to it; death passes o’er,  
And Satan cannot harm us.  
Alleluia! Amen.*<sup>1</sup>

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

**[Intro]**

Throughout our life, we pass through many doors. We pass through sliding doors. We pass through revolving doors. We pass through glass doors, wooden doors, metal doors. We pass through doors with nobbs. We pass through doors with handles. We pass through so many doors.

Sometimes, we even have to choose a door. If we are remodeling or building a new house, we have to choose the portal of our desire. Or, if you find yourself on “Let’s Make A Deal,” you have to choose the right door to win the prize.

In today’s gospel lesson, Jesus says of Himself: **“Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door.”**

Yes, we have many doors we can walk through, but there is only one door that opens to eternal life.

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, *Christ Jesus Lay in Death’s Strong Bands*, LSB 458, stanza 5

A Chinese man who converted to Christianity expresses this truth this way:

“A man fell into a deep pit, miry and slippery. As he lay injured at the bottom, Confucius looked in and said, ‘My friend, I am sorry for you; if you ever get out of that place, take care that you never fall in again.’

Then a Buddhist priest came along. He said, ‘I grieve to see your plight. If you can manage to climb up two thirds of the way, or even half, I might help you up the rest.’ Unable to rise, such advice was mockery.

Then Jesus came by. Descending into the pit, Jesus lifted up the man to safety.”<sup>2</sup>

On this Fourth Sunday of Easter – Good Shepherd Sunday – we remember how it is only Jesus who rescues us and brings us – straying sheep – to safety. He came so that we may have life and have it abundantly.

### *[Shepherds and the Sheep]*

Throughout Scripture, we often hear about shepherds and sheep. Possibly the most beloved is from Psalm 23: **“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want”** (Psalm 23:1). In this Psalm, we hear how the shepherd leads the sheep and no fear, death or evil will ever harm the sheep.

John 10 is another beloved text. Possibly the most familiar part of John 10 are these words from Jesus: **“I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me... and I lay down my life for the sheep”** (John 10:14, 15).

The imagery of shepherds and sheep come up time and time again in God’s Word. Each time, we find comfort knowing that everyone in Christ are His sheep and as His sheep, we are protected from the evil one as we inherit eternal life.

You may wonder, why does God use this imagery? You may also wonder, what is so great about a shepherd anyway? We may wonder this, especially in today’s context.

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<sup>2</sup> *Encyclopedia of Sermon Illustrations* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1988), 33-34.

But, during the Old Testament times and the earthly ministry of Jesus, being a shepherd was tough! Even today in the Near East, being a shepherd is much tougher than being a shepherd practically anywhere else in the world. So, why is this?

Well, the Near East has very little grass, so the sheep are more prone to wander. And wandering would likely lead to disaster for the sheep as there are many narrow plateaus and deserts. So, the shepherd's task was not only constant, but dangerous. The shepherd has to guard the flock against wild animals, especially against wolves, and there are always thieves and robbers ready to steal the sheep.

So, the shepherd must be constantly vigilant. He must be fearless. And, he must be patient for his flock.

In our Gospel, Jesus describes Himself as *“the door of the sheep.”*

So, what does a door have to do with a shepherd? Well, at the end of each day, the shepherd would lead his flock back home. When the sheep were going into the fold, the shepherd held his rod across the entrance, quite close to the ground; and every sheep had to pass under it. As each sheep passed under, the shepherd quickly examined it to see if it received any kind of injury throughout the day.

This is what it means to be “the door of the sheep.” It is only through the shepherd's inspection, that the sheep have safety.

But, what about us? Yes, we are *like* sheep in that we are prone to wander, but we aren't exactly sheep. This is why Jesus used this figure of speech.

But, we, who are *like* sheep have often gone astray. Some of us have strayed from correct Christian doctrine and teaching. Some of us stray to what's new and attractive. Some of us have strayed to false gods, such as money, government, fame, athletes and celebrities.

In the Gospel lesson, Jesus teaches us sheep of the one exclusive way we may have life and have it abundantly.

### *[Warnings for the Sheep]*

First, Jesus warns the sheep. He says: ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber”*** (John 10:1).

Now, by thief and robber, Jesus is not referring to Moses, the prophets, and other godly leaders who proclaimed ***“the Door”*** of the promised Messiah. Instead, Jesus is referring to the corrupt Jewish leaders of His time.

Jesus is saying that the thieves and robbers are the false Jewish leadership that had come into control since the second Temple — the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Every thief and robber is ***not*** a shepherd. Through deceit, they attempt to get the sheep into *their* power. These false leaders rule by fear, the very opposite of the gentle care of shepherds.

Today, thieves and robbers still try to steal and kill the sheep. Some thieves and robbers are obvious, while others are deceivers. The obvious are in it for purely financial gain, like Kenneth Copeland, Joel Osteen and Jimmy Swaggart. They preach by scratching our itching ears saying that if you only listen to them you will be successful, you will be popular, and you will be healthy.

Others hide their deceit and sound like pious Christian preachers, but instead of saying we are saved through Christ alone, they leave open the door to heretical teachings — that is, teachings that do not lead to salvation, but to damnation — saying that there are other ways to salvation apart from Jesus.

Each thief and robber reject Jesus as ***“the Door,”*** but instead are purely self-seekers who trust *their* authority, instead of God’s authority. Thieves and robbers want to turn us inward – toward our feelings and our works – rather than toward Jesus and His blood-bought gifts.

True shepherds of the sheep, proclaim Jesus as the One and only Door to the sheep. True shepherds lead the sheep to Jesus — the Good Shepherd — and Jesus leads the sheep to eternal life.

***[The Door]***

Jesus says: ***“I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture”*** (John 10:9).

As ***“the Door,”*** Jesus calls the sheep and the sheep follow Him. Journalist Henry Vollam Morton (1892-1979) tells of a scene that he saw in a cave near Bethlehem:

He said, “Two shepherds had sheltered their flocks in the cave during the night. Now, how were the flocks to be sorted out? One of the shepherds stood some distance away and gave his peculiar call which only his sheep knew, and soon his whole flock had run to him, because they knew his voice. They would have come for no one else, but they knew the call of their shepherd.”<sup>3</sup>

Jesus is ***“the Door.”*** And, He calls us by name. He first taught you to recognize His voice at our Baptism and through the preaching of His Word and the Sacrament of the Altar, He continues to teach us and lead us through this sinful and chaotic world with His voice.

At the same time, we must learn to distinguish His voice from the loud and alluring voices of our day. Sheep who do not learn the voice of their Shepherd will soon follow any voice. Outside the Church, it’s only cold and deadly – there is no forgiveness and no life – there is only death.

The Good Shepherd’s voice calls us to repentance. His voice calls us to feed us on the lush pastures of His Word and Sacrament. His voice leads to life!

Through Christ’s atoning death upon the cross, He has ***“bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds [we] have been healed. For [we] were straying like sheep”*** (1 Peter 2:24-25a).

And, through His glorious resurrection on the third day, we ***“have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of [our] souls”*** (1 Peter 2:25b), so that we ***“may have life and have it abundantly”*** (John 10:10b).

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<sup>3</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of John Volume 2: Revised Edition* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 57.

Jesus is the entrance — *the exclusive entrance* — to eternal life. He, the Good Shepherd, is the Door! That is, sin, death, and hell have to get through Him in order to get to you and me, who are safely gathered in the Lord's pen.

Although, we often stray, Jesus does not forget about His sheep. Through His under-shepherds whom He calls and sends in His name, Jesus guards and keeps His sheep in the green pastures of His Church, leading His sheep beside the quiet waters of our Baptism and spreading the feast of His table before us. Since He has called us by the Gospel to be His own dear sheep, we hear and know His voice in the preaching of His Gospel and follow Him by faith.

Jesus — the Door and Good Shepherd — leads us to salvation all by grace through faith in Him alone!

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.

✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠