

SERMON FOR MAY 3, 2020

TEXT: JOHN 10:1-10

THEME: HE KNOWS YOUR NAME

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. ² But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. ⁵ A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” ⁶ This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁷ So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

In the name of Jesus:

A pastor was speaking to a Sunday School class about what he does as a pastor. He shared with the children that he is like a shepherd and the members of his congregation were his sheep. When the pastor asked the children if they knew what a real shepherd does, one boy raised his hand and confidently said: “the shepherd fleeces the sheep.” Sadly, in America, fleecing the sheep is seen as something that is evil, where one takes advantage of others. But in the business of being a shepherd, fleecing the sheep is necessary, for when a shepherd fleeces the sheep, he is actually taking care of the sheep.

Shepherds have a unique relationship with their sheep, because the shepherd loves his sheep. That is why Jesus uses this picture in the Gospel lesson for today, for Jesus says that He is the Good Shepherd, and He knows His sheep by name. And it is for this reason that the sheep follow the shepherd, they know his voice and they follow him.

In America we don't see shepherds like you do in other countries. Travel to the England, Scotland, Wales, or Israel, you see shepherds out in the countryside, tending to their sheep. Shepherds are few and far between here in America. You don't see them, but they are there.

The shepherds we tend to follow lurk behind the scenes. They are what we might call subtle shepherds. The subtle shepherd is the thing that will call for our attention, so that we listen to the call to be like everyone else in the world and follow. These subtle shepherds make great promises, but don't deliver on their promises.

The Book of Proverbs describes the call of these subtle shepherds who call for our attention in terms of a harlot, one who cannot be trusted, "with much seductive speech she persuades him with her smooth talk she compels him, all at once he follows her he does not know it will cost him his life." (Proverbs 7: 21, 23).

In spite of this warning, the subtle shepherds call out for our attention. We want someone to lead us and guide us through these troubling times. In

the past we have trusted in these subtle shepherds, placing our faith in our health, our jobs, our retirement plans, the pursuit of pleasure, and in excess. We have been fooled into thinking if only we had this, or that, or more of what we crave, then we would find happiness. Then we would be secure. And yet, the things we have placed our trust in haven't proven to give us the lasting security and love that we all want. The things that we have trusted in have been replaced by layers of red tape as people seek jobs or try to file for unemployment. Our faith in our economy has come up empty as companies lay off or furlough workers. The subtle shepherds that we have placed our faith in are of no help when we are fighting an invisible enemy such as Covid-19, they are of little comfort when a loved one is in the hospital, or when someone dies. These subtle shepherds and their promises come up empty, we know them but they don't know us and don't even know our name!

Jesus calls these thieves and wolves. They don't care for God's people. Their intent is to deceive and destroy. Jesus knew well these destroyers, for He was able to see firsthand what a shepherd would do in order to protect his sheep. That is why Jesus is able to explain His work in this way: ⁹I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

Jesus is the True Shepherd, the Good Shepherd, who speaks to you through His Word today. He alone is your ever-present Help in times of trouble. He is the one who is not only with you today, but He will also help you navigate an uncertain future. He knows your name and He even knows the number of hairs on your head. He invites you to cast your care on Him for He cares for you. He invites you to listen to His voice and follow Him today.

He is not like all of the other shepherds that command out attention. He makes no demands, He stands at the door and knocks, inviting you to come to Him with your burdens and troubles, and He will give you rest. He asks you to listen to His voice and learn from Him for He is gentle and lowly of heart.

He knows your name because He has called you by name in the waters of your Baptism, “calling you by name and leading you out” as John says in the Gospel lesson for today. He is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep. He comes to you in power, but not the type of power that the world knows. Jesus comes in the power of His love, while He was on earth He set aside His divine power and glory to live and die for you so that you would belong to Him. He has purchased you with the price of His innocent suffering and death. Nothing will ever separate you from God’s love.

That is why Jesus calls Himself the Door. Whenever the night would come, the shepherd would make certain that all of his sheep were safely inside the stone barrier where they would be kept for the night. The shepherd would then lay his body down across the opening to the sheep stone fence. No wolf or thief would dare cross over to harm the sheep, because if they did, they would have to deal with the shepherd. No wolf comes in unless he crosses over the shepherd, and if he does, then he has to deal with the shepherd. That is why Jesus says: "I am the door."

Jesus is your Good Shepherd. He laid down His own life for you. Even though we live in uncertain times God's Good News for you is this: You have a Good Shepherd in Jesus, who knows your name and promises to take care of you. He knows what you are going through. He tasted suffering in life, He knew the agony of death. He lived the life you live only He did it without sin. He did it for you. He died and rose from the grave, so that you might know for certain that Christ has risen from the grave, He lives for you now, and He lives to help you in your time of need. God has a will and a way in this world. So listen to the voice of Jesus. He will never leave you nor forsake you, so that you can confidently say, The Lord is my Helper, I will fear no evil, for Jesus will lead and guide me and I will know that goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord. Forever. Amen