

Sermon on **John 10:1-10** for Confirmation Sunday/Good Shepherd Sunday
St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church – New Ulm, MN – Pastor N. Scharf – 5.3.20

Happy Good Shepherd Sunday and Happy Confirmation Day! I would have liked to see you all here, but out of love for the health of our neighbors and due respect for the government God has given us, we meet online. We grieve online. We celebrate online looking forward to the day we can do so in person. I do not think you will ever forget this day. You may forget who preached, who played or what songs we sang, but this special day, your confirmation day, will be hard to forget. It is a day we celebrate because you, confirmands, have developed so that you can grasp more deeply the truths and love of God. ...because God has given you family who have pointed you to Christ. ...because you've had opportunity to sit at the feet of well-trained godly teachers who bring you the Good Shepherd and help you understand and grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ Jesus – the great salvation God gives in Word and Sacrament. ...because today you publicly confess that faith and are welcomed into adult membership in your church and are properly prepared to receive the Lord's Supper. This is not graduation from God's Word or the last learning you will need from God's Word. This is simply the foundation laid in Christ Jesus on which you continue to grow in God's Word throughout your life. ...because

The Good Shepherd gives you a Full Life.

Jesus tells us where to find this gift (in John 10:1-10) as he addressed the Pharisees who continued to reject him as Messiah, Son of Man and Son of God even though he had healed a man blind from birth. *“Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice.”* Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.” (Verses 1-6 – NIV 2011).

The Pharisees set themselves up as Israel's leaders and shepherds, but they rejected the only Savior and showed themselves thieves and robbers. Many come wanting to lead the sheep – you and me. But what will benefit the sheep? Jesus tells us. True shepherds are the ones who use the gate, not ashamed of the Gospel. The sheep learn to know them as ones who bring the message of God's Word in its truth and purity. True shepherds let them hear the Good Shepherd's voice. Jesus gives the sheep safety now and eternally, good pastures for our souls, the freedom of forgiveness in Jesus Christ alone who lived a perfect life for us, died on the cross for our sins and sinfulness, and rose again to prove that we are forgiven and justified by him. True shepherds bring the Word of God.

False shepherds are all over. Anyone who tries to touch your heart, your soul, your thinking but does not bring Christ as true God and Redeemer of mankind is someone to run away from. Some lead churches, some write books, some you will sit at their feet in their classroom learning various subjects, some you may be related to. Their journeys only lead you back to you – as your own savior, or to another false god. Their call tempts you to let go of God's Word for worldly wisdom or to slightly alter the Scriptures. They see no need for gathering with believers or studying the Word or your catechism. Their call can sound good, even wise. Run from it.

This voice is not just out there, it is in every sinful heart – yours and mine. It says we are wiser than God's Word. Our sinful natures want us to live our own lives apart from God's commands and promises, not realizing the slavery, the guilt and the death – the speedbumps that line that road to hell. We want what the world wants – moral or immoral – two sides of the same coin that place us in the driver's seat. The Pharisees prided themselves as moral high grounders; the unbelievers rejected Christ too. Both were headed to hell.

We too would be lost, but Jesus' voice is beautifully different. He has come to **give you a Full life** now and eternally.

Jesus called you. He rescued you. Confirmands, you confessed that already at your examinations - "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth." "I believe in Jesus Christ." "I believe in the Holy Spirit - I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel..." You've been given a new heart, a new person, that with full confidence confesses the words of Luther's explanation to the second article - "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord. He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death. All this he did that I should be his own, and live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he has risen from death and lives and rules eternally. This is most certainly true."

From my limited experience - when you come into a cow's barn, they really do not care. They just look at you, maybe you get a moo, hopefully not a kick. Unless you have food or a cattle prod, you do not matter. Sheep are different. When you approach a sheep pen, unless they know you and trust you, they run away from you. You are sheep by God's Grace. You only have one Savior. Follow him. Do not follow anyone who does not bring Him and His Word in its truth and purity. Listen regularly to the Shepherd's voice in God's Word. Do they bring Christ as the full atonement for the sins of the world and our only way to heaven? Do they bring the freedom of living for him in the grace, forgiveness and power he gives? Or do they point you to the slavery of living to please self or this world in sin? Do they bring worldly wisdom that points you to your feelings or to human mottos that disregard God? Do they point you to your works to find salvation? You are His sheep. There is only one way to be saved.

"Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." (Verses 7-10 – NIV 2011).

The only way to eternal life and a full life here and now is through Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our Savior. Anyone who leads you away from him is a wolf in sheep's clothing – looks good and pleasing to the eye, sounds good and wise, but if it is not through Jesus or in line with His Word, there is going to be a feast, but the feast is you – your soul, your comfort, your salvation hurt, lost, destroyed. Run to the Shepherd. Run to the Gate.

Jesus is the gate through which we find life – safe in his forgiveness and love, peace which we cannot find within but that he alone gives us – peace with God won by him. He gives proofs of his love, forgiveness and rescue – our Baptism – where he promised that through water and the Word of God we are saved, buried and raised with Christ, clothed in Christ's righteousness; the Lord's Supper, where we sinners in need of complete saving and comfort for our troubled consciences, receive Christ's very body and blood in, with, and under the bread and wine because he says it is, for our forgiveness. We have the Word of God. We have a custom here where each confirmand chooses a passage that they'll carry with them as they make their promises to follow the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, all the days of their life with his forgiveness, love, strength and guidance. Ask them why they chose their passage. They will tell you – beautiful confessions of faith. Each passage is a wonderful promise or truth that God gives us. It may one day be the text for their Christian Funeral when the Lord calls them home.

You are the sheep of God, his flock. Jesus alone is the Gate to life. Follow him alone, and those who bring him and are in line with his Word. This is a day that you will not want to forget. With joy publicly confess your Savior, now and throughout your life as you continue to follow Him – his Word, his Sacraments, his Voice, and *the Peace of God which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*. And you will *have life, and have it to the full* now and eternally. **The Good Shepherd gives you a full life.** Amen.