

Sermon for May 7, 2017 – Easter 4

John 10:1-10 (Evangelical Heritage Version)

Theme: Know Your Shepherd's Voice

- 1) Run away from the stranger.
- 2) Only trust the man who enters through the door

“Amen, Amen, I tell you: Anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the door, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ²The one who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The doorkeeper opens the door for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own sheep, he walks ahead of them. The sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵They will never follow a stranger, but will run away from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.” ⁶Jesus used this illustration in speaking to the people, but they did not understand what he was telling them. ⁷So Jesus said again, “Amen, Amen, I tell you: I am the door for the sheep. ⁸All who came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the door. Whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰“A thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”

What do you think about this statement: “Since all churches are basically the same, it doesn't matter what church you go to, as long as you go to church”?

Let me change the statement a bit. Imagine me telling a child: “All adults are basically the same, so it doesn't matter which adult you spend time with, as long as that person is an adult and claims to know your parents.”

“Whoa! Hang on a second, Pastor: that is extremely dangerous advice! Adults are not all the same. There are some very bad people out there who want to hurt our children. Worse yet, these bad people will seem exceptionally nice and claim to be good friends with a child's parents.”

Exactly!

Now think about it: if you wouldn't want your child hanging around an adult merely because that adult “claims” to know you, what makes you think God the Father wants his children hanging around any religious leader simply because they claim to know him?

If this is the case, which religious leaders, then, should we listen to? Let Jesus himself answer that question for you, under the theme: **Know Your Shepherd's Voice:** 1) Run away from the stranger. 2) Only trust the man who enters through the door.

Part One: Run away from the stranger

Our sermon text finds Jesus addressing some Pharisees in a crowd, who considered themselves to be Israel's spiritual shepherds. Warning against them, he says:

“Amen, Amen, I tell you: Anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the door, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber.”

That makes sense, doesn't it? Imagine you were at home with your children at night, and someone tried to sneak in through a window. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that this person is up to no good. If the person was a family member or friend, they would go to the door and let a parent invite him in. The fact that he refuses to come to the door shows he's got something to hide.

The same is true in a spiritual sense. If someone, claiming to be a servant of Christ, tries to approach us with any other teaching than what God has set forth in his Word, you can be sure that this person is a false teacher who, whether he realizes it or not, is actually trying to steal your soul away from Christ. If he were a true servant of God, he would approach you through the “door,” as Jesus himself says:

²The one who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The doorkeeper opens the door for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own sheep, he walks ahead of them. The sheep follow him because they know his voice.

Can you picture the beautiful scene Jesus paints with His words? The loving shepherd doesn't have to sneak into the pen to get his sheep. He goes through the door. And the sheep, even if they can't see him, recognize his voice and come running to him when he calls. Even though every sheep might look the same to us, the shepherd knows each one individually because he cares for them. And the sheep know it. Such a shepherd does not have to “drive” his sheep from behind. No, he leads his sheep from the front, knowing that they will follow his voice.

Jesus is our “Good Shepherd.” When he calls out to us through his Gospel, we come running to him. Why? Because we recognize the voice of the one who both created and saved us. He knows us by name, having declared us to be his dearly loved lambs at our baptisms. He feeds us with daily bread. He leads us safely through every dark valley. More than that, Jesus has proved his love for us in a very special way: he rescued us from the eternal slaughter house of hell to which we deserved to go because of our sins. How did he do this? By offering up himself on the cross in our place. Through the shedding of his blood, Jesus purchased us for himself. And, after rising from the dead, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit out to gather us through the preaching of the Gospel so that we might belong to him.

Christians know the voice of their Shepherd. They hear it every time the Gospel is proclaimed in its truth and purity. But. . .

⁵They will never follow a stranger, but will run away from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.”

Sheep don't hang around people who are merely "like" their shepherd. No, they run away from everyone who isn't their shepherd – and so should you!

Brothers and sisters in Christ: this world is a dangerous place. Many voices claim to speak the truth, but few actually do. Whether they realize it or not, those many voices are actually doing the devil's bidding – as he tries to murder our souls by leading us away from Christ. Understand this truth and flee from anyone or anything that doesn't sound exactly like your Savior. Avoid every false religion and do not fellowship with any false teaching church – even if you think their false teaching is minor. Why? Because there is no such thing as a "minor" false teaching. No matter how insignificant it may seem, false teaching always serves the purpose of stealing us away from Christ and killing our faith in him. Therefore, be like sheep who run away from everyone who doesn't sound exactly like their shepherd.

Part Two: Only trust the man who enters through the door

But that leads us to ask: With all the different church bodies claiming to be correct, can we ever know for certain who teaches the truth and who doesn't? Yes, we can. How? Jesus tells us:

“Amen, Amen, I tell you: I am the door for the sheep. ⁸All who came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the door. Whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.

What does Jesus mean when he calls himself the door for the sheep? He means that those who truly represent him will only approach his sheep through him. And this means more than just claiming to be Christ's representatives. Jesus' true under shepherds will come with the same voice as Christ – that is to say, teaching in all points the same Gospel that Jesus taught.

Therefore, before you follow any pastor (and this includes me!) make sure that pastor comes through the door of Christ –teaching the Gospel in its truth and purity. But how will you know whether or not he does that? I mean, there are so many people telling us that the Bible says this, that or the other thing. There are so many different interpretations of the Scriptures. How are we to know who is right?

The only way to know for certain is by studying the Bible ourselves. Don't just believe a person because what he says sounds good. Check it out for yourselves in Scripture. Look up the proof passages he offers in context, and let the Bible itself convince you of the truth.

“But,” you might say, “that is beyond me. I am no theologian.” My response is: neither were the Bereans, to whom the apostle Paul once preached. And yet the Bible says that *they examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.*ⁱ They made sure that the voice they heard was that of their shepherd, and once they were convinced of that, they followed him in joy.

Therefore, brothers and sisters in Christ, study the Scriptures so that you may know the voice of your Good Shepherd. Read the Bible at home. Join a Bible Class here at church where you will have opportunity to ask questions and discuss what the Bible really says with fellow believers.

Through these means the Holy Spirit will work in your heart the ability to discern who teaches the truth and who doesn't. Truth be told, you could do God no greater honor than digging into the Scriptures to see whether or not I preach the truth. Then your faith won't be based merely on what I say, but on the LORD and what he says.

"But Pastor," someone might say, "I know all this stuff already. I went through Immanuel's grade school back when we had one. I've been a life-long member of this congregation and have attended more Sunday services than I can remember. I don't need to read the Bible at home or come to a Bible Class because I already know what's important and can discern right from wrong."

My answer to such an objection is: If you can truly discern truth from falsehood without any further study of Scripture, then – praise God - you are wiser than all of Jesus' apostles, all of whom diligently continued to study the Scriptures so that they might be able to discern their shepherd's voice.

But consider what Jesus once told some people of his day, who felt comfortable in their religion: *He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.*ⁱⁱ In other words, if we refuse to study the Scriptures because "we know it all" and "have no interest" to learn more, then we show ourselves to be sheep of a different shepherd than Christ. And why do I say that? Because Jesus' sheep come running when he calls; they don't stay away. Jesus' sheep want to learn more about him because they understand the reason he came to this earth.

And what reason is that? Jesus himself tells us in the last verse of our text: *I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.*^v

Yes, Jesus came to give us life, as he himself said on another occasion: *God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*ⁱⁱⁱ And it is only through faith in Jesus that we receive this eternal life, as he himself once said: *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*^{iv}

The forgiveness of sins, life and salvation – these are the blessings that Jesus offers his sheep. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance that we recognize his voice so that we might follow him when he calls. Then we won't be led astray by those who wish to harm us. And why not? Because we will remain close to our Savior –under his protective care as we follow the under-shepherd he himself has given us to lead us home to himself in heaven. Amen.

ⁱ Acts 17:11 NIV84

ⁱⁱ John 8:47 NIV84

ⁱⁱⁱ John 3:16 NIV84

^{iv} John 14:6 NIB84