

John 10:1-10
4th Sunday of Easter (Good Shepherd Sunday)
May 3, 2020—Shepherd of the Mountains, Pinetop, AZ

INI

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, on this Good Shepherd Sunday we look at several verses from John chapter 10, the Good Shepherd chapter of John. But this morning, in the verses we have appointed, Jesus doesn't say, "I am the Good Shepherd." Rather "I am the door." But in these verses, we see one of the functions of a good shepherd.

I'm told that shepherding in Biblical culture would be much like having livestock on the open range around our neck of the woods. One difference, of course, would be that instead of cows wandering the range, it would be sheep. Often a handful of shepherds would have their sheep scattered across the landscape, grazing throughout the day. And the shepherds would help each other out.

As the sheep were grazing during the day, in addition to watching out for them, keeping them out of trouble or rescuing them from trouble, and scaring off or fighting off any predators, one of the things the shepherds would do is gather up stones or sticks or thorn bushes from the landscape to build a barrier. A temporary sheepfold would be constructed on the landscape or near the entrance to a cave. There would be only one way in or out. And in the evening the sheep would be herded into this area for safety.

Then, as the sheep slept in this enclosed area, one of the shepherds would also sleep. He would make his bed in the entrance to this enclosed area. No sheep could get out without stepping across the body of the shepherd. If a predator wanted to get at the sheep he also had to go through the shepherd. If another shepherd wanted to get in to the sheep, he too had to go through the shepherd. In this sense, the shepherd was literally the door. If you wanted out, you went through him. If you wanted in, you went through him. This is simply one of the functions of a good shepherd.

But, for us to understand why Jesus is saying these things, we need to go back a little bit to an account we heard several weeks ago. In chapter 9 of John's gospel, just before this saying of Jesus, He had healed a man who was born blind. Well, the Pharisees caught wind of it and came questioning the man. The man answers them about what happened. It was simple. Jesus had healed him. But the Pharisees didn't want to accept this. They didn't want to accept Jesus. So, they tell the formerly blind man, and you can hear their accusing tone with their words, **"You are his disciple but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from."**

And then the man says something that really ticks them off. **"Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."**

The problem is that the Pharisees were the ones who claimed spiritual enlightenment, but they couldn't see Jesus. They refused to see Him for who He is. They should have been shepherding God's people. They should have been leading them into His sheepfold. But instead, they were robbing the people of the pleasure of being Jesus' sheep, of being in His company and following Him.

They were supposedly experts in the Word of God, but really, they had become experts at twisting it to suit their own purposes, taking verses out of context, filling their teachings with opinions and doctrines of man rather than the Word of God. And with their legalism, the authentic biblical faith had been transformed into a new religion, one of works.

The man that Jesus healed, they kicked him out of the synagogue simply because he had started to believe in and follow Jesus. So, this figure of speech Jesus uses this morning is directed against them, against the Pharisees. Jesus is calling them thieves and robbers.

And against the danger and threats of these thieves and robbers standing outside of the sheepfold, these wayward shepherds standing outside of the Kingdom, Jesus the Good Shepherd stands firm in the doorway boldly proclaiming to them, **"I am the door. You can't get in any other way, except going through me.**

You can't bribe your way in with your works. They're worthless.

You can't charm your way in with your reputation. I know what you do in secret. I know your innermost thoughts.

Sure, you could build another sheepfold that you could easily get into. You could invite everyone else in who meets your requirements. Let me know how that works out for you in the end.

It seems like it shouldn't need to be said again. It seems like it should be a no-brainer. It's right there in God's Word. Jesus is the only way to the Father. He is the only one who can get you out of your grave alive. But there are still thieves and robbers out there, false shepherds trying to lead us astray. It's easy to spot some of them. Those who claim a different god by name are easy to spot and avoid. But there is a growing number of so-called Christians out there who believe and teach their children that there are many roads to heaven, that there are many ways into the Kingdom, that as long as you try really hard, as long as you pick a belief system (any belief system) and do your best, as long as you think happy thoughts and do your best to make the world a better place, as long as you, ya know, just be a good person, you too can get into heaven. *Salvation? Why would we need that? We're all basically good, after all. Sure, we make mistakes. But sin? That's just a concept invented to guilt people into behaving a certain way.* These are the thoughts and words of thieves and robbers and false shepherds.

For Jesus, this world of thieves and robbers and false shepherds was not imaginary. It was not merely a figure of speech. It was real. He was serious. Dead serious. He was betrayed by a thief, crucified under the rule of false shepherds who would rob the people of the Kingdom of God, and was buried in a tomb. Our Good Shepherd did what only the Good Shepherd could do. He laid down His life for His sheep.

But then something else happened that we celebrate this season, that really we celebrate every Sunday. Our Good Shepherd rose from the dead proving to us that He is who He says He is, assuring us that He is the Gate, the Door, and the true Shepherd who leads us to everlasting life.

And there stands Jesus still, the Good Shepherd, standing in the door of the sheepfold, checking who it is that is trying to enter. And He's pretty strict. Anyone who thinks themselves worthy will be left outside. But anyone who comes to Him today pleading for mercy, broken by life, crushed by their own sin and guilt, clinging to nothing more the promise flowing from a bloody cross, a lifeless body, and an empty tomb, and a risen Savior, He leads them in to find green pasture and still water and a feast and a cup full of mercy and forgiveness.

Today we hear His voice calling us again. And we, His sheep, recognize it. It is the same voice that we heard calling us when that water was poured over our heads. It is the same voice we hear each week as His Word comes to us in song and prayer and praise, in scripture readings and in our sermons. And it is the same voice that invites you today saying, **"I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that [you] may have life and have it abundantly."** Amen.