

John 10:1-10

ILCW A—Easter 4

April 30/May 3, 2020 at Peace, Wautoma

This morning our hearts hear the voice of our Good Shepherd calling to us in the gospel according to Saint John, chapter 10, the first ten verses. Let us pray. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he gave us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Amen. Dear brothers and sisters in the flock of Christ our Good Shepherd,

Perhaps never before in our lives has getting reliable news been more important. If everything we watched or heard or read was really the news, then we wouldn't have to make that statement. But with so much spin and so little fact checking or objectivity, many people have been led to question the news. True journalism has become a rare thing today. A clear presentation of the facts with actual numbers, fact checking and an unbiased approach are hallmarks of journalism which are falling by the wayside. In times of uncertainty, we need a voice we can trust, one who will never steer us wrong, but give us the clear facts we need to weather the storm in which we currently find ourselves. Today we hear that voice. And we know it well. Let us **listen to the Good Shepherd because he is the true way and the true way leads to eternal life!**

Listen to the Good Shepherd because he is the true way! When Jesus spoke these words, he had just healed a man blind since birth in the presence of the Jewish leaders. Jesus had been asked about the hardships in this man's life, **"Who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?"** Jesus explained that the blindness occurred **"so that the work of God might be displayed in his life."** When the foolish, hard-hearted Pharisees learned that Jesus had healed this man on the Sabbath, they accused him of breaking the law.

In the midst of this conversation over his healing of the blind man, Jesus speaks the words of our lesson today. And what an audience he has! The newly seeing, formerly blind man, Jesus' own disciples, the attacking Pharisees and any other Jews who had gathered all heard these words. Jesus took full advantage of such a large audience to share some valuable teaching. **"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. The one who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep."** Immediately Jesus begins drawing a distinction between himself as the true Shepherd and those who seek to lead or guide the sheep by false means to the wrong places.

Maybe you are wondering why Jesus starts making his point with the word we usually put at the end of our prayers. The basic meaning of 'amen' is I solemnly tell you the truth. Jesus was impressing on his audience the importance of what he was telling them. Jesus, as only he can, is saying as the Good Shepherd, "Not only is what I am about to say the absolute truth, but I am guaranteeing it will happen." What a great Good Shepherd we have!

The Pharisees were the false shepherd, trying to climb in over the wall or under the fence. Their goal was not good, but to steal away the sheep in the guise of wanting what is best for them. And the Pharisees certainly lived up to that expectation! They piled all kinds of unnecessary laws on the people's hearts in addition to the Ten Commandments. The Pharisees led people to believe they could earn their way into heaven by the good things they did. That way of thinking only leads into the trap of the devil.

But how often don't we find ourselves thinking that way in these difficult days? If I treat my family a little better, maybe this will all end and we can go back to normal. Maybe if I keep the commandments better it will help God see people really can change. All kinds of voices vie for our attention these days. And the temptation is real to listen to none of them or to listen to the wrong ones rather than the voice of our Good Shepherd Jesus. Trying to earn God's love for us, going into spiritual isolation, or giving false shepherds a hearing will only hurt us spiritually in the long run.

But our Good Shepherd Jesus leads us to an entirely different destination in an entirely different way. "The doorkeeper opens the door for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out." Jesus leads us to salvation by his own accomplished saving work. Our Good Shepherd speaks to us with the only voice this world has ever known which has never spoken a sinful word. Our Good Shepherd speaks to us with the only voice which could say from the cross, "It is finished," and actually be able to follow through on forgiving our sins. Our Good Shepherd speaks to us with the only voice which still speaks, even after death, because our Good Shepherd laid down his life on the cross to rescue his sheep from sin, death and hell. But then he rose from the grave to take up his life again in order to lead us to the green pastures and streams of living water found only in heaven. Listen to our Good Shepherd because he is the true way and he will never lead you astray.

Getting good direction compared to getting bad directions can make all the difference when it comes to school work, a big project at your job, or a do-it-yourself improvement goal for your home. Never has that been more true for us than the situation in which we now find ourselves. Especially in times like we are facing right now, let us listen closely and often to the voice of our Good Shepherd Jesus! **Listen to the Good Shepherd because the true way leads to eternal life!**

Most of what Jesus says in the first half of our lesson is meant for the Pharisees. But his teaching is falling on deaf ears. "Jesus used this illustration in speaking to the people, but they did not understand what he was telling them." The Pharisees claimed to know everything about the way of salvation. They claimed to have true spiritual insight. But in reality they were the false shepherds condemned throughout Scripture. The Pharisees made salvation conditional and uncertain. They used fear and intimidation to control the people. No true spiritual shepherd acts this way. So Jesus tries to paint the difference between himself and the false teachers as clearly as possible. "All who came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them." Their good-sounding goal has an evil end in mind. "A thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy."

Maybe you have been feeling like the false shepherds are winning lately. Maybe false thinking is flirting with your soul. We already know all this stuff, pastor. Why should we watch or read your sermons if we can't actually go to church? Or we think trying harder will make God love us more. We feel isolated, not just from each other, but from Jesus. We get sad or frustrated or impatient or angry. We feel hopeless or indifferent. The days all run together. Where is the Good Shepherd if the sheep are scattered?

Our Good Shepherd is the same place he always is: in our hearts by faith, in his Word and ruling in heaven for the good of his church. He still sends the Holy Spirit to call, gather, enlighten and sanctify his church even if we cannot meet in a building. We are never isolated from Jesus, but encouraged by words directly from his own mouth in the Bible. Jesus makes sure we know the way to the place where he is, heaven, because he is the way! Jesus lived perfectly, died to forgive us and rose from death to open heaven to us. That is how we remain strong in our faith and get to heaven. The true way of our Good Shepherd leads only to eternal life in the green pastures of heaven. **"I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."**

When we follow our Good Shepherd, we follow the way to heaven. **"I am the door. Whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture."** Jesus guides us through these trying days. Jesus guides us to his unchanging and kept promises in his Word. Our Good Shepherd leads us to his empty cross and grave to assure us of eternal life. Jesus leads us to his life-giving gospel in the Word and sacraments for our abundant new life in him as his sheep. Listen to the Good Shepherd because he is the true way and that way leads us to eternal life! Amen.

Now may the God of peace—who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, in connection with his blood, which established the eternal testament—may he equip you with every good thing to do his will, as he works in us what is pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ. To him be glory forever and ever. Amen.