

The Fourth Sunday Of Easter, Good Shepherd Sunday	(May 3, 2020)	1850
Lesson From Acts: Acts 6:1-9; 7:2a, 51-60		The Common Service: p. 15
Epistle: 1 Peter 2:19-25		432
Gospel: John 10:1-10		Psalm 23
Text: John 10:1-11		152 vs. 1-4
Theme: <u>"I Am The Good Shepherd."</u>		Offering: 152 vs. 5-8
I. The true Shepherd enters by the gate.		436
II. The sheep listen to their Shepherd's voice.		
III. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.		

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

John 10:1-11

[Jesus says:] "I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman 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 they did not understand what he was telling them.

Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He 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.

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

Lord Jesus, our Good Shepherd, cause us to listen to your voice, to hear the wondrous news of the salvation you have won for us by laying down your life for us, your sheep. Cause us to follow as you day by day lead us in the paths of your righteousness. Amen.

Dear sheep of the Good Shepherd,

John, chapter 10, is often referred to as the Good Shepherd chapter of the Bible. Even though we do not often see flocks of sheep with shepherds guiding them, as the people of Jesus' day did, still, this picture that is used so often in the Bible is a favorite of Christians still today. I'm sure many of you have pictures in your homes of Jesus the Good Shepherd with his sheep, holding a lamb, or rescuing a sheep from a cliff, or carrying a sheep on his shoulders. These pictures are common. If I were to ask you, "What is your favorite chapter of the Bible," many of you would say, "Psalm 23": "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures..." Many of you could recite it.

The shepherd and his sheep is such a tender, heart-warming picture. Apart from the shepherd, the helpless sheep would have a hungry miserable life that would soon come to an end. But their shepherd leads them to green pastures, to quiet waters. He protects them from their enemies and saves them from the many dangers that threaten

them.

In the same way Jesus says, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. Jesus came that we might have a life, a life free from the curse of sin, a life worth living, a life that lasts forever, and have it to the full. Jesus says: "I Am The Good Shepherd."

One of the many threats to sheep was that of thieves and robbers, who would sneak into the sheep-pen and steal the sheep. The sheep pen was usually a square enclosure, built of stones with heavy thorns on the top of the wall as a protection against thieves. On one side was a roofed shelter for the sheep; and the arched door to the pen, heavily barred, was built into one corner of the wall. Still thieves and robbers would climb the walls to sneak in and steal the sheep.

Jesus describes the sheep pen of God's church, and the thieves and robbers who try to sneak in to destroy his sheep. He says: "I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him."

The Pharisees and religious leaders of Jesus' day regarded themselves to be the leaders, the shepherds of God's people. But they were self-made shepherds with no divine call from God. They did not proclaim the truth of God's word, nor did they have any concern for the sheep. As thieves and robbers they had snuck into the sheep pen to steal from the people everything good and holy that God through Moses and the prophets, through his word, had given them; to rob them of their soul's salvation. They had snuck into the sheep pen to steal the sheep from Jesus their true shepherd.

Obviously we also have our thieves and robbers today, who sneak into God's church pretending to be shepherds. But instead of proclaiming the word of God in its truth, they steal the precious gospel message from the sheep, thus robbing them of the full and free salvation the Good Shepherd has won for them.

"I am the good shepherd." Jesus says. Jesus did not sneak into the sheep pen. He came from above, was sent by his heavenly Father. The Old Testament had foretold his coming in detail. John the Baptist had the privilege of introducing him: "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." At Jesus' baptism, and at his transfiguration, God the Father declared: "This is my Son. With him I am well pleased." Jesus' ministry was from God and according to God's word.

Jesus goes on to say, "I am the gate for the sheep." Any shepherd or pastor [The word pastor means shepherd.] in Jesus' flock must enter through him. They must know their Lord from Scripture, they must be sent by him, have a divine call through the word of God through Christ's Church. How can we tell which shepherds are true, and which are thieves and robbers? By what they preach. A true shepherd will preach the true gospel of Christ.

That brings us to the second main point this today: The sheep listen to their shepherd's voice.

Anyone who has ever worked with sheep knows how true this is; the sheep follow the voice of the person they have come to know, the voice of the one who cares for them. They don't go by what they see. They go by what they hear -- the voice. Experiments have been done where the shepherd switches clothes with someone else. Still the sheep will follow the one with the familiar voice. When a stranger calls to them, they will stop.

If he calls to them again, they will turn and run from him.

Describing the shepherd and sheep of his church, Jesus says, "The shepherd 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 knows the sheep of his flock. He knows them individually, by name. He cares for them dearly, and lovingly he guides them day by day with his voice, his word.

Those also whom Jesus has placed as shepherds, as pastors over his flock, care for his sheep. They guide the sheep, not with some voice of their own, but with the Savior's voice, his word, his precious gospel.

Jesus' true sheep recognize that voice, that gospel. They delight in it. They follow it. Be the shepherd who he may, a guest preacher, a new shepherd amid the flock, a temporary shepherd. The sheep listen to that voice of the Savior that comes through them. But they run away from those who speak with a different voice, a voice of work-righteousness: "Do this or do that and then God will be pleased with you." A voice of social gospel that merely says: "Let's love others, help others, join hands and change the world by what we do." A voice of conditional grace: "If you serve the lord with your life and give your heart to God, then you will be saved." Many listen to these foreign voices. But when Jesus' sheep, who are familiar with the preaching of law and gospel, hear these voices, they realize, "Something doesn't sound right here," and they flee.

How different the voice of our Shepherd: "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." "Your sins are forgiven." "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."

Dear friends, your Shepherd, your Lord Jesus, cares dearly for you. He continues to guide you, and will continue to guide you day by day through your life with his holy word, giving you life to the full.

Your Shepherd has done something for you that no other shepherd could do. Knowing why he had come, and what he would do, Jesus said: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." As a shepherd could lose his life fighting a wild animal that had attacked the flock, so Jesus would walk the road to the cross, to save you from sin, death, and the devil. Even while that Good Shepherd was dying for his sheep, they would hear his voice: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." "This day you will be with me in paradise." "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me," as he suffered your hell. "It is finished," declaring your redemption complete, your salvation won fully and freely yours, heaven open to you, as his resurrection on the third day further proves.

Where would we be without our Shepherd? We would be in the hands of Satan. We would be in the despair of sin. Our time here on earth would be nothing but a living death, with nothing to look forward to but eternal death in hell. But we hear our Shepherd's voice: "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."

Amen.

May the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will! Amen.