

St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church
Sermon by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz
Easter 3 April 13, 2008 **John 10:1-10**



"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."

People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

I saw the newest *National Geographic* sitting on a table by the lunch room. It had a picture of a puppy on the front – the cover story – *Inside Animal Minds!* I read about New Caledonian crows. These crows from forests on a Pacific island make and use tools. They use sticks as probes and hooks – leaf stems to poke into places where fat grubs try to hide! How smart are these crows? In the lab they put a basket with a piece of meat in it – in the middle of a glass tube. They put two wires near the tube – one straight – and one with a hook – for lifting the basket out of the tube. Before the test crow can pick the hooked wire – another crow snatches it away. No problem. The test crow takes the straight wire – bends it with her beak in a crack in the floor – makes a hook – then pulls the basket out of the tube! Oh, there are birds that hide little clumps of food – hide it well – and then remember where they hid it – so they can retrieve it and eat it before it spoils! How smart is that? Have you ever had a little Tupperware container – that gets pushed to the back of the refrigerator? Before you know it – it's spoiled – covered with little blue and green fuzz? Have you ever pulled the plastic wrap off a bowl of food – smelled it – and asked anyone nearby – when did we have this last? Wild birds can be pretty smart! What about us? God's Word says today we are like sheep! Sheep aren't famous for being smart. They aren't famous for being brave or strong or quick. The only thing sheep have going for them – is the shepherd's love. Sheep would be sunk – were it not for the shepherd who loves them and takes care of them. This Good Shepherd Sunday God's Word reminds us:

The Lord Is My Shepherd

1. We are like sheep

2. Jesus – the shepherd loves us very much!

It is always important to remember the context. In the Gospel of John – chapter 9 – Jesus was going along – when he came near a man born blind. Jesus' disciples asked him flat out,

“Rabbi, who sinned – this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” This is again the opinion of the law – the part of our sinful flesh that we are born with – that thinks – if you are good – good things happen to you. And if you are bad – bad things happen to you. If something terrible happens to you – somehow you must deserve it. So – was this man bad – or were his parents bad – that something as painful as being born blind happened to him? **“Neither this man nor his parents sinned,”** said Jesus, **“but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”** Jesus made some mud from the soil – and mashed it into blind man’s eyes. He told him to go wash out the mud in the Pool of Siloam – and when he did – he could see! The Pharisees – were very upset – that Jesus did this miracle – what they considered sinful work on the day of rest. The questioned the man born blind. He said Jesus must be a prophet – because he gave him his sight. The blind man’s parents were afraid of the Pharisees – that they would throw them out of the synagogue – so they said – don’t ask us – ask our son. When they asked the man born blind again – **they said, “Give glory to God... we know this man (Jesus) is a sinner.”** The blind man did give glory to God. How could Jesus be a sinner – and work such a powerful miracle? Did the Pharisees want to become Jesus’ disciples too? **Then they hurled insults at him and said, “You are this fellow’s disciple! We are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don’t even know where he comes from. The man answered, “Now this is remarkable! You don’t know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” To this they replied, “You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!” And they threw him out.** Later Jesus found the man he had healed and asked him point blank – **“do you believe in the Son of Man?”** When he realized the one who was asking him was Jesus himself he said – **“Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him. Jesus said, “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind...”**

Now comes chapter 10 – Jesus talking to his disciples about the Shepherd and his sheep. **“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 word picture – of God’s people being his sheep is nothing new. In the scroll of the Prophet *Isaiah* there is part of a Hebrew poem – that talks about unfaithful shepherds – and wicked sheep. Because the LORD – the Great I AM – the Holy One of Israel – loves his people so much – he will send fierce Judgment – fierce discipline to call his people to repentance. We need to take these words very much to heart. **“Come, all you beasts of the field, come and devour, all you beasts of the forest!** The beasts are our deadly enemies! **Israel’s watchmen are blind, they all lack knowledge; they are all mute dogs, they cannot bark; they lie around and dream, they love to sleep...** Shame on the watchmen – if we do not warn you! Shame on the watchmen – if we do not warn you – danger, danger – in “hugs and kisses” before and outside marriage. Danger, danger – in loving money – the flat screen high def TVs more than Jesus. Danger, danger – if we love sports – soccer and baseball and swimming lessons – and the Brewers and pretty soon the Packers again – that we will spend as much as it takes – for the jerseys and the tickets and the autographs – and will curse and swear and throw things – when over paid pudgy men – don’t play a children’s game as well as we think they ought to. Danger, danger – when we teach our children by our powerful example that all kind of things – this summer – are more important than coming to church! There is

danger if **they are shepherds who lack understanding; they all turn to their own way, each seeks his own gain. "Come," each one cries, "let me get wine! Let us drink our fill of beer! And tomorrow will be like today, or even far better."** Remember the beer commercial that used to say – it doesn't get any better than this? Remember? There is danger – if our focus is on the things of this world – the pleasures and self-indulgence of this world – instead of remembering, **"Blessed are they who hear the Word of God and keep it!"**

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." Michael DeBakey was a cardiac surgeon. Back when I was just two years old – he invented a Dacron tube to repair arteries. He made this tube on his wife's sewing machine. I'll bet it was one of those sewing machines where you had to push this pedal back and forth to make the needle go up and down. Dr. DeBakey – who is 99 years old – did – it's hard to believe – some 60,000 heart operations. Is that possible? The other day Dr. DeBakey was not the surgeon but the patient – on whose own heart someone else performed the procedure that he pioneered! The fact is – what Dr. DeBakey did – was postpone the deaths of most of his patients. Dr. DeBakey said – the worst thing of all was when a patient died during the surgery. He said you are never ready for it. And you die a little every time it happens. There is something horribly wrong with your heart and mine – and it's got nothing to do with clogged arteries or cholesterol or triglycerides or damage from heart attacks or strokes. What's wrong with our hearts is a condition we are born with. It's part of our family history. It's in our DNA. It's the fatal terminal problem of sin. Only Jesus could fix it – not with surgery – but with a transplant – a new heart – a heart of faith and forgiveness. It cost Jesus his life to save yours and mine! **Jesus came that we might have life and have it to the full.** I was by my doctor the other day and we talked about the man who 12 years ago – despaired and self-destructed. His physical heart was transplanted. The man who received this gift of life – ultimately met and married the widow of the donor. Twelve years later – the recipient of that transplanted heart – despaired and self-destructed – the same way as the donor had. My doctor said – they say with a physical heart often comes sadness in your heart of hearts. That one kind of heart ache often brings with it the other kind of heart ache. I believe that! Jesus came to make us strong against temptations to sadness and depression and despair. Jesus came to make us strong – so that we don't just get by – don't just survive – but **that we might have life and have it to the full!**

I have come that they may have life and have it to the full." There are people everywhere – who are looking for a full life – for enlightenment and for purpose, meaning, fulfillment. Listen to talk radio or watch afternoon television and you will find all sorts of people who claim to have discovered enlightenment and purpose. Often times they talk about being spiritual without being religious. They don't think about forgiveness of sins. They think about doing the right thing – being busy – being active – having purpose and focus to do what needs to be done – giving them a feeling of peace and accomplishment and satisfaction. Their focus is not on forgiveness and a place in heaven – but making a heaven on earth – putting an end to injustice and poverty and sickness and suffering. Jesus certainly talked about putting your faith into practice. God's Word certainly talks about fruits of faith – **the love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and self control** that both motivate and empower us to do not random acts of kindness but acts of kindness motivated by the Gospel for the glory of God! Practical and focused ways to lead more productive and more peaceful lives – dare not replace the preaching of **Christ crucified and risen.** The Good Friday and Easter Gospel is not a

given – that fades to insignificance – replaced by all sorts of Zen parables about living in the present – forgiving the sins of the past – looking for opportunities to stop and smell the roses and to end racism, poverty, injustice and suffering! Jesus' main purpose was not to drive out the Romans – to clean up corruption in Rome and Jerusalem – not to end poverty and disease among the poor. He came to proclaim – **repent – the kingdom of God is near!** He came to call us to be fishers of men's souls. He called us to see that He is the **Lamb of God – who takes away the sins of the world.** Nothing dare crowd out nor replace the Easter Gospel!

National Geographic – Inside Animal Minds – did have a page about sheep. Those who study sheep say – sheep are very good at recognizing different faces – the different faces of about 50 sheep and 10 people. And once they learn these faces – they are very good at remembering them – even 2 years later. They say sheep are calmed by familiar faces – and can tell if you are happy or angry – and they much prefer happy. They think the way a sheep's brain encodes different faces and understands emotional cues – may have something to do with people and some of our emotional problems. I think that might be very true. I don't mind talking to people on the phone – but I very very much prefer to talk to people face to face. I think it's very important to see the face of the person I am talking to – to see their eyes – to look into their eyes – to see their expression! **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' sheep recognize his voice. They know what Jesus sounds like. They know God's Word and they listen to it. We will not be misled. We will not follow strangers. We will follow Jesus until we are safe at home in the sheep pen of Heaven – because Jesus – our Good Shepherd – loves us very much! Amen!

To God alone all glory!

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