

John 10:1-10
Fourth Sunday of Easter
April 26, 2026

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Every church year, after three weeks of Gospel accounts that highlight the Lord's post-resurrection appearances to His disciples, the fourth Sunday of Easter marks a shift in the Easter season... a shift *away from* the historical record of the resurrection appearances and a shift *to* themes of the risen Lord's forever-after care of His Church. And, on this fourth Sunday of Easter, those themes of the Lord's forever-after care of His Church always begin with the theme of the Good Shepherd.

Indeed, if one wants to find in Scripture the passages that relate to the Lord's governance over and care of His Church, we need not look at the book of Acts for Jerusalem Councils, nor need we debate what it means that they "had all things in common and... were selling their possessions... and distributing... as any had need." Those may be descriptive of the early Church, but they are no more authoritative in the Church's care and governance than Jesus' own

words. And His own words on the matter seem to begin with these words of our text, as He paints the picture of the care of sheep.

And, by the way, before we get into this text itself, consider the relationship between this theme and last week's text. Last week, the risen Jesus showed the disciples on the road to Emmaus – and showed us all – that He would care for His Church through teaching and table fellowship – Word and Sacrament. Consider that he had already foreshown that in the great miracle that proved to be the only miracle recorded by all four gospels. All four evangelists wanted us to know the feeding of the 5000, in which Jesus had compassion on them for they were “as sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew's account says)... and how did he care for them? He taught them, and he had the apostles seat them in groups of 70 and 100 so that they could all be fed the food of their God-man host – and no one would be overlooked. Yes, it seems *this* is the universal picture of Christ's care of His Church.

And, if that miracle puts it in flesh-and-blood incarnate truth, Jesus also teaches it in doctrinal, thematic truth (if you will) – the “Good Shepherd” teaching that begins with our text.

Now, when we consider this chapter, we love to think of Jesus as the Good Shepherd who cares for the *one* sheep – and all of us say, “that sheep is me.” But, what is true for one is true for all. In fact, not only is the chapter about Christ's care of *all* the sheep; but also this chapter begins with Jesus not even first calling himself the

Good Shepherd. The first use of that term isn't until verse 11, the verse *after* our text.

To understand these first ten verses of the Good Shepherd chapter (the verses of our text) rightly, we must see that Jesus is responding to those at the end of chapter 9. We know chapter 9 better as the chapter of Jesus healing the man born blind. But, at the end of that chapter he is debating the pharisees, who ask, "Are we also blind?" And Jesus responded, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains." And *then* Jesus continues, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber."

Notice the connection Jesus makes: those who say "We see" and thus claim to be something when they are not, those who claim to be true teachers of God when they are not – deceiving others and deceiving themselves – "that man" (Jesus says) "is a thief and a robber." And, if the pharisees are thieves and robbers, they cannot be the true religious leaders (the true governance) of God's Church.

But, note where the emphasis is in these early verses of John 10. If the theme is already the true care of *the sheep*, the protection of *the Church*, the focal point of that theme early in these verses is not the shepherd, but the door – the gate, the entrance – of that sheepfold. That's what Jesus promises Himself to be. The gate of the sheepfold, the entrance to the green pastures of eternal life, the

door that protects the sheep from any imposters and intruders. If the Church is a mighty fortress, the Christ who is the way into that eternal life is the impenetrable gate, the castle 'draw bridge,' (if you will) who serves as entrance into that mighty fortress. There is no true Church where Christ is misplaced or shelved; He alone is your entrance into the eternal safety of the sheepfold. Or, as Jesus himself says it, "No one comes unto the Father, but by me." By him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life... who is the ladder to heaven, on whom the angels ascend and descend.

Through Him, and through Him *only*, one has access to the sheep; and the sheep have all the safety and benefits of the sheepfold. Apart from him, nothing but sinister false shepherds and endangered sheep.

This is the true governance of the Church. It is not truly guarded by voters' assemblies nor councils nor boards and governing bodies (though they have their place in civic, temporal matters of congregational life). But, the Church is guarded by Christ, and Him alone. One who seeks to enter the sheepfold without the authority of Christ is an imposter who will lead the sheep away from their true Good Shepherd. He alone is the gate, the doorkeeper, the line of defense that allows the sheep to graze peacefully in the green pastures of the Church's paradise.

But not only is He the Door and line of defense that safeguards them from imposters, He is also the Shepherd whose

voice they know and trust, the One who will lead them to all good grazing upon the Word and promises and gifts of God. Without Him, they love to stray and go wayward; but His voice, they hear and recognize – sometimes, His gentle, patient call of the Holy Law that calls them to stop wandering, turn around, and follow Him to safety; other times, His loving, merciful Word of forgiveness, assurance, compassion, encouragement. Any pastor or teacher who will speak anything other than an echo of Christ’s voice is an imposter, thief, robber. Any pastor whose sole joy is to echo Christ, you may trust as a true undershepherd joyfully accountable to the Good Shepherd.

Now, in meditating upon this, we ought notice a few details: first, notice that nowhere does Jesus talk about the growth and glory of the Church. He does not claim the pasture and sheepfold will get ever-larger and more impressive. His singular concern is that the pharisees’ teaching represented a more general danger than just their own self-righteousness... the danger was to the sheep, the sheep’s safety, the sheep’s life: “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy,” Jesus says; but, “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” So, Jesus’ goal and purpose for His Church is its life, a life abundant not with possessions and numbers and glory, but abundant in its share of wherever Christ leads and whatever Christ promises. They know His voice; so they know what promises are from Him and what promises are *not* from Him.

That leads to the second detail you ought notice: Christ first calls himself the door, then the Shepherd. He takes full responsibility for the sheep. And yet, He also specifically gives an initial image where He, the door and gatekeeper, gives entrance to the shepherd. In other words, the Church is right to see that it is Christ, and He alone, who has authorized the Holy Ministry. This office is no man-made invention to stroke the egos of wanna-be CEOs. It is a holy office not because it makes officeholders more important Christians, but is holy because it is given by Christ precisely to care for and guard the sheep so important to Christ Jesus... so important are you to Him that He gives not some man-made office but His own divine office for your care. Imposters to this Office – whether pharisees or hirelings or Judaizers or glory-seekers – are wolves, thieves, robbers, and Christ will defend His sheep from them at all costs, even if it means destroying the destroyers.

He does this through the authority of His Word... the Word the sheep recognize because they know His voice. And, as they know that Word and learn and depend upon that doctrine, they are increasingly strong and sharp to recognize imposters who impose their *own* doctrine rather than true under-shepherds who echo *Christ's* doctrine. Those that serve unfaithfully are brought to nothing; those who serve faithfully share the joy and peace of the sheepfold. There's no judgment based on growth, success, glory... just truth, the Word of Christ, faithfulness, and – therein – peace.

This is the true governance (maybe a Law-sounding word there), the true shepherding care (Gospel-sounding description), the true makeup and life of the Church and every congregation thereof at the altar of God... so that what Jesus speaks of and (if you will) institutes in his teaching, we see described in its flesh-and-blood incarnate truth and life in the book of Acts. From our first reading: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” Notice what’s listed first? – the apostles’ teaching, the sent ones’ teaching... those sent by Christ... thus Christ’s teaching. That alone – nothing subtracted from, nothing added to – that alone is the Church’s doctrine: *Christ’s* teaching, the exposition of which is able to be fact-checked by the norm that is the Sacred Scriptures. And, with that teaching, fellowship in the things of God... fellowship around the Word of God, fellowship most intimately at the altar of God... and so, “the breaking of bread” ... not just “breaking bread” as described later in the reading, but “*the* breaking of bread” ... that which highlights and serves as pinnacle of the life together in the Divine Service, that Service of Christ that is known in the good order of “*the* prayers” Acts says... not just generically ‘a prayer life,’ but the liturgical order of prayers... even some carried from the Old Testament Church and given voice in the New Testament Church.

That whole picture is the great shepherding of Christ for His sheep, those sheep who are all equals – no Christian higher or less

than the next, no member able to say “I have no need of you” to any other member, but rather “all who believed” Acts says, “were together and had all things in common.” And in that equality of importance, generosity toward one another... distributing to those “who had need.” (Notice, by the way, how that phrase actually undermines those who want to claim the early Church lived as some sort of a religious communism. No one can have any more need than another, no one can be subject of others’ generosity, if they all are of perfectly identical material equity. Indeed, right after this, Ananias and Sapphira’s situation shows they had land to do with as they pleased; the Church of God did not compel them to depart with it or give it to the whole company of believers in the name of fairness.

The Church’s equality is one of baptismal identity in Christ. We are all equally the dear sheep of the Good Shepherd. That is the basic governance and care of His Church. He pulls one sheep out and says, “By all the other sheep’s acknowledgement, you will serve as undershepherd accountable to Me,” but that’s about it. And, as sheep who mutually know those green pastures to which Christ leads and in which Christ tends to them, we all may rejoice that the crucified and risen Christ is Head of His Church.

And our concern and goal within this Church is not our own ability for kingdom-building and growth and success, for (Acts says) “*the Lord* added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

So, ours is to simply follow the voice of the Good Shepherd we know – ours is to “Listen to him,” the voice from the cloud of glory exhorted us. Ours is to chew upon and meditate upon every Word of his teaching, to benefit from every gift He sacramentally gives... and ours is to joyfully share the Gospel of our salvation especially with those we know and love, that they too may share the safety and security of those who are cared for by Christ. And ours is to rejoice in this safety and security, knowing that – no matter how often the devil seeks to intrude, seeks to plant landmines, seeks to throw hand grenades, seeks to steal away a sheep to fill the belly of the wolves, seeks to distract and annoy and unsettle life in the green pastures – no matter how active the devil is against this little holy Church, the Good Shepherd is trustworthy and true – He has conquered and is risen! – and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them in their coming and going, from this time forth and forevermore.

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

Rev. Mark C. Bestul
Calvary Lutheran Church
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