

Sermon for April 30, 2023 – Easter 4

John 10:1-10 (EHV)

Theme: **Know Your Shepherd's Voice**

- 1) Run away from the Stranger.
- 2) Only trust the man who enters through the door.

“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. ²The one who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The doorkeeper opens the door for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own sheep, he walks ahead of them. The sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵They will never follow a stranger, but will run away from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.” ⁶Jesus used this illustration in speaking to the people, but they did not understand what he was telling them. ⁷So Jesus said again, “Amen, Amen, I tell you: I am the door for the sheep. ⁸All who came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the door. Whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰“A thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”

Evaluate this statement: “Since all churches are basically the same, it doesn’t matter what church you go to, as long as you go to church.” Based on conversations I’ve had throughout my ministry, many would agree with that sentiment. But is it true?

Let me switch topics for a moment. Imagine me telling a child: “All adults are basically the same, so it doesn’t matter which adult you spend time with, as long as that person is an adult and claims to know your parents.”

“Whoa! Hang on a second, Pastor: that is extremely dangerous advice! All adults are not the same. Some terrible people in the world want to hurt our children. Worse yet, these evil people will seem exceptionally nice – claiming to be good friends with a child’s parents to gain their trust.”

And that, dear friends, is precisely my point: if you would not want your child hanging around an adult merely because he “claims” to know you, what makes you think God the Father wants his children hanging around any religious leader simply because they claim to know him?

But if that is the case, which religious leaders should we follow? Let Jesus himself answer that question for you, under the theme: **Know Your Shepherd's Voice:** 1) Run away from the stranger. 2) Only trust the man who enters through the door.

Part One: Run away from the Stranger.

Our sermon text finds Jesus addressing some Pharisees in a crowd, who considered themselves Israel's spiritual shepherds. Warning against them, he said:

“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.”

That makes sense, doesn't it? Imagine being at home with your children and hearing someone trying to sneak into your house through a window. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that this person is up to no good. A family member or friend would have gone to the door.

The same is true in a spiritual sense. If someone claiming to be a servant of Christ tries to approach you with any other teaching than what God has set forth in his Word, you can be sure that this person is an agent of Satan - trying to kidnap you away from Christ. Why do I say that? Because if he were a faithful servant of God, he would approach you through the “door,” as Jesus himself says:

²The one who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The doorkeeper opens the door for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own sheep, he walks ahead of them. The sheep follow him because they know his voice.

Can you picture the beautiful scene? The loving shepherd does not have to sneak into the pen to get his sheep. He goes through the door. And the sheep, even if they can't see him, come running to him when he calls because they recognize his voice. And even though all those sheep might look the same to us, the shepherd knows each one individually because he cares for them. And the sheep know it. Such a shepherd does not have to “drive” his sheep from behind. No, he leads his sheep from the front, knowing they will follow his voice.

Jesus is our “Good Shepherd.” We come running to him when he calls to us through his Gospel. Why? Because we too recognize the voice of the one who created and saved us. He knows us by name, having declared us to be his dearly loved lambs at our baptisms. He feeds us daily bread – providing everything we need for this life. He leads us safely through every dark valley. More than that, Jesus has proved his love for us in an extraordinary way: he rescued us from the everlasting slaughterhouse to which we deserved to go because of our sins. How did he do this? By offering up himself on the cross in our place. By shedding his blood, Jesus purchased us for himself. And, after rising from the dead, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit out to gather us through the preaching of the Gospel so that we might belong to him.

Christians know the voice of their Shepherd. They hear it every time the Gospel is proclaimed in its truth and purity. But. . .

⁵They will never follow a stranger, but will run away from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.”

Sheep do not hang around people who are merely “like” their shepherd but not actually him. No, they run away from them – and so should you!

Brothers and sisters in Christ: this world is a dangerous place. Many voices claim to speak the truth, but few do. Whether they realize it or not, those many voices are doing the devil's bidding – as he tries to murder our souls by leading us away from Christ. Understand this truth and flee from anyone or anything that does not sound exactly like your Saviour. Avoid every false religion and do not fellowship with any false-teaching church – even if you think their false teaching is minor. Why? Because there is no such thing as “minor” false teaching. No matter how insignificant it may seem, false teaching always tries to steal us away from Christ. Therefore, be like sheep who run away from everyone who doesn't sound exactly like their shepherd.

Part Two: Only trust the man who enters through the door.

But that leads us to ask: With all the different church bodies claiming to be correct, can we ever know who teaches the truth and who does not? Yes, we can. How? Jesus tells us:

“Amen, Amen, I tell you: I am the door for the sheep. ⁸All who came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the door. Whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.

What does Jesus mean when he calls himself the door for the sheep? He implies that those who genuinely represent him will only approach his sheep through him. And this means more than just claiming to be Christ's representatives. Jesus' true under-shepherds will come with the same voice as Christ – that is to say, teaching in all points the same Gospel that Jesus taught.

Not only that, but it's essential for us to recognize that God's true representatives will only lead you to and through Jesus because, as the Bible says: *“There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved.”ⁱ* Yes, it is only through Jesus that we have eternal life. Consequently, not only must the Lord's under-shepherd come in, from, and through Jesus, we must follow them to and through Jesus to receive the forgiveness, life, and salvation God desires us to have.

Therefore, before you believe any pastor (including me), make sure that pastor comes through the door of Christ –teaching the Gospel in its truth and purity. But how will you know whether he does that? I mean, so many people tell us that the Bible says this, that, or the other thing. There are so many different interpretations of the Scriptures. How are we to know who is right?

The only way to know for sure is by studying the Bible yourself. Do not just believe a person because what he says sounds good. Check it out. Look up the proof passages he offers in context and let the Bible itself convince you of the truth. On top of this, know that the key to understanding the Bible is Jesus. Everything must lead us to him, as Jesus himself once said: *You search the Scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them. They testify about me!ⁱⁱ*

“But,” you might say, “studying the Bible is beyond me. I am no theologian.” My response is: neither were the Bereans, to whom the apostle Paul once preached. And yet the Bible says that

*they examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.*ⁱⁱⁱ In other words, they made sure that the apostle Paul's teaching was the very word of God.

Therefore, brothers and sisters in Christ, study the Scriptures so that you may know the voice of your Good Shepherd. Read the Bible at home. Come to worship. Join one of Divine Word's Bible Classes, where you will have the opportunity to ask questions and discuss God's Word with fellow believers. Through these means, the Holy Spirit will work in your heart the ability to discern what is truth and what isn't. God wants you to dig into his Word to test me too. Why? So, your faith won't be based on what I say but on what Jesus says.

"But Pastor," someone might think, "I have been a lifelong member of this congregation and have attended more Sunday services than I can remember. I don't need to read the Bible at home or come to a Bible Class because I already know what's important and can discern right from wrong."

My answer to such an objection is: If you can genuinely discern truth from falsehood without any further need to study Scripture, then you must be wiser and more holy than Jesus! Why do I say that? Because even Jesus, the very Son of God, made attending synagogue and reading the Scriptures his custom while he walked this earth.^{iv} And if Jesus himself understood the importance of meditating on the Bible, who are you to say, "I don't need it?"

Take to heart Jesus' warning: *Whoever belongs to God listens to what God says. The reason you do not listen is that you do not belong to God.*^v In other words, if we refuse to study the Scriptures because "we know it all" or "have no interest," then we show ourselves not to be Jesus' sheep. How so? Because Jesus' sheep come running when he calls - they do not stay away. Jesus' sheep want to learn more about him because they understand why he came to this earth.

And what reason is that? Jesus himself tells us in the last verse of our text: *I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.*"

Yes, Jesus came to give us life, as he said on another occasion: *God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.*^{vi} It is only through faith in Jesus that we receive this eternal life, as he once said: "*I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father, except through me.*"^{vii}

Forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are the blessings that Jesus offers his sheep. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance that we recognize his voice so that we might follow him when he calls. Then we will not be led astray by those who wish to harm us. Why not? Because we will remain close to our Saviour – under his protective care - as we follow the under-shepherds that he himself provides for us – under-shepherds that speak only the words Christ gives and who, in all things, lead us to him. Amen.

ⁱ Acts 4:12 EHV

ⁱⁱ John 5:39 EHV

ⁱⁱⁱ Acts 17:11 NIV84

^{iv} Cf. Luke 4:16

^v John 8:47 EHV

vi John 3:16 EHV
vii John 14:6 EHV