

#### 4<sup>th</sup> S of Easter 4/21/24 - SJ, SM

John 10:1-18 - "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. <sup>2</sup> The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup> But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." <sup>6</sup> Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them. <sup>7</sup> Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. <sup>8</sup> All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. <sup>9</sup> I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. <sup>10</sup> The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. <sup>11</sup> "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. <sup>13</sup> The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. <sup>14</sup> "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— <sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. <sup>17</sup> The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. <sup>18</sup> No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."

In the name of our Good Shepherd, DFR:

Do you know what a Judas Goat is? It's a goat that is used to lead a group of sheep to their deaths. You see, sheep cannot easily be driven to slaughter but sheep *will* follow a goat. And a goat that is used to lead the sheep to the killing pens is known as a Judas goat, undoubtedly named for Judas Iscariot.

The picture of a Judas goat is a fitting one for us to look at today, because our Good Shepherd warns us, his sheep, that there those out there in the world that do not have our spiritual well-being at heart. So we listen to our Good Shepherd today as he warns us:

Watch Whom You Let Into Your Life!

1. There are dangerous thieves and robbers
2. Let in only the Good Shepherd

#### 1. There are dangerous thieves and robbers (1,5,8,10a)

I wish I could tell you today that there was no such things as false teachers and false prophets, but I can't. Jesus tells us today that they are real, that they do exist, and we can't pretend that they don't exist when Jesus starts out today by saying: **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.**

Jesus of course is not talking about the kind of people who want to steal our TVs and stereos, and the family's jewelry, cameras and such. These are the people who would steal our salvation and our Savior from us.

Robbers and thieves don't identify themselves. None of them wears a shirt or a hat that says "I break into people's homes" or "I mug people for a living."

Sheep were kept in a walled enclosure. The walls were high enough to keep the sheep from getting out, and to keep wild animals from getting in to attack the sheep. There was also a gate, which is the way the shepherd would enter and leave the sheep pen, and it was guarded by a gatekeeper at night to make sure that no unwelcome guests arrived.

Anyone who climbed over the walls was not the owner of the sheep, and his intentions were certainly dishonest. And while the shepherd of the sheep cared for the sheep, and sought what was good for the sheep, these people don't care for the sheep, but they only care about what they can get for the sheep, how much money someone will give them.

Today, those who would steal Jesus' sheep sometimes go door-to-door. And some of them are very successful, as unwary sheep invite those false shepherds who are really wolves in disguise into their own homes and listen to them. Or they take their literature and read it, and somehow mistake the thieves and robbers for under shepherds, true shepherds, of their Good Shepherd.

But these false shepherds will advertise in magazines. Some have their own television shows or radio shows. But Scripture tells us how to identify these people who would steal us from our good shepherd:

Some people believe that anyone who comes to them and wants to talk about God, or who wants to talk about the Bible, has to be worth listening to. What a dangerous misconception that is! I've personally seen both members of my family and members of our churches who have been lost because they chose to be cordial and friendly to these false shepherds who are really wolves in disguise.

God's Word even warns us that even if an angel from heaven were to come to us, that if what that angel says to us does not agree with God's Word, that angel will be condemned.

However, it isn't just ourselves we need to be concerned about, is it? We know that the thieves and robbers of souls target our children, the young and vulnerable. Wolves will often go after the very old and the very young animals, or the animal that is injured so it is easy prey.

So it is today. The devil and his soul stealers often look to steal the old and the young, the hurt and the lonely. They might be willing to spend hours visiting with a lonely old person or befriend a lonely college student.

In Christian love, we are to be concerned about the fact that these thieves and robbers are after not just our own souls, but the souls of every Christian. But are we? Do we daily – or even weekly – or even monthly, worry about them, reach out to them or remember them in our prayers?

## **2. Let in only the Good Shepherd (2-4,7,9,10b)**

The gatekeeper for the sheep checked carefully to make sure that the only person he let into the sheep pen was the shepherd. As Jesus tells us: **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.**

The relationship between the sheep and their true shepherd was so close, that they spent so much time together, that they could recognize the voice of their shepherd, much like a dog grows to know the unique voice of its owner. And when the sheep heard the true shepherd's voice, they recognized it, and they would come to him. But when they heard the voice of another, the voice of someone who was *not* their shepherd, then they would avoid that person, because it was not their shepherd.

Jesus urges us to be like sheep, knowing him so well, that we recognize his voice. And we do that by knowing what Jesus has told us in his Word. Reading, hearing and listening to his words again and again so that we know the special voice of our Good Shepherd, as he speaks to us from the Word.

That Jesus is no ordinary shepherd and that what he offers us, his sheep, is better than what any earthly shepherd offers is detailed by Jesus' next words: **Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.**

Our true shepherd didn't come to take care of our physical needs, though he certainly does provide us with every we need for the care of our earthly bodies. When we make him the shepherd of our souls, he promises that we will be saved through him. All our sins are taken away. Everything stain and sin that would keep us from heaven has been dealt with by our loving and kind good shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep.

Jesus goes on to say: **I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.** Yes, our shepherd does give life to his sheep. But not just life here in this world. He came into this world to give us eternal life, and so that we could enjoy all the blessings of heaven for all eternity. David in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm knew that his shepherd offered him heaven, because he wrote that he knew that he would  **dwell in the house of the Lord forever.**

But that isn't just David. We too will dwell in the house of the Lord forever!

We know that there are evil men and women who would destroy our faith and rob us of our salvation. But by immersing ourselves in the Word, we hear his voice, and we follow him, and we follow him throughout this life – until at last he leads us to the green pastures of heaven, Amen.