

John 10:1-10 (NIV2011)

Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ² The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice.” ⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them. ⁷ Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Sermon Theme: Safety in the Gate

Little girl wakes up scared. Running to mom and dad's room she nestles in, burying her head because she wants to feel safe.

I can't tell you how many times I go to bed at night only to get up again simply to make sure that I really did lock the house. Locked doors can help us feel safe.

These last weeks with social-distancing and self-quarantining has been all in the name of safety and keeping things safe.

We want to feel safe. Really, in order to function well, we need to feel safe. Whether we recognize it or not, much of what we do is trying to keep ourselves from feeling or being vulnerable. So generally we try to avoid those things and situations that jeopardize our safety.

It shouldn't come as any surprise that the Bible describes us not like brave lions, but sheep. Sheep are vulnerable. Sheep like to wander. Sheep need protection. If their actions aren't putting them in danger, there's nature, wild animals, thieves and robbers that put the flock at risk. Yes, we are sheep. But we have a Good Shepherd who cares for and protects his sheep. We have a Good Shepherd who is working to bring us safely through the gate.

In John 10 Jesus is addressing those around him and especially the Pharisees. These were the spiritual leaders of the Jews whose job was to point the people to the Christ, God's Chosen One. But Jesus wasn't the Christ they were looking for. So instead of opening the gate to heaven, they were slamming it shut. Many directed the people's eyes to look inward at their works to save them. Many taught trust in your personal actions for safety before God. And then here comes Jesus who preaches being saved is something God does for you. Having a right relationship with God is done to you.

And so these Pharisees watch their power and prominence decline as the people start listening more to Jesus. They didn't like that and it was well known they would kick anyone out of the synagogue—the center of their regular worship life—for supporting Jesus (John 10:22).

So Jesus calls them out, **“Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ² The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice.”**

In Jesus' day, the sheep pen consisted of four walls with one gate for the opening. On top of those four walls there were usually sharp thorns or spikes to try and keep the sheep safe. It makes sense: the shepherd enters through the gate. They had no need to go over the walls. Who would do that? Such people were thieves and robbers. So Jesus is saying to the Pharisees, “You are supposed to be the shepherds of God's flock. But because of what you teach, you are thieves and robbers. True shepherds enter by the gate.”

Quick trivia time: what does the word *pastor* mean? If you guessed shepherd, you are correct. Pastors are the shepherds of God's flock and spiritual leaders of God's people. As it was in Jesus' day so it is today: the pastor's number 1 responsibility is to speak the voice of the shepherd and lead people through the gate. So how do you know which pastor to listen to? How do you know which shepherd to follow? Listen to their voice. Listen to what they say. Are they leading you to Jesus? Or are they like the Pharisees who instead of pointing to Jesus are climbing over the walls trying to avoid him?

Today you probably won't hear a pastor say you don't need Jesus. But one may add to what Jesus says giving the idea that Jesus hasn't done enough. Instead you just need to prove you are a Christian by having a certain feeling, by doing certain actions, needing to make up for something you've done in the past. Another takes away from what the Good Shepherd says. They might avoid those hard teachings because it makes people uncomfortable. They dilute the truth to little more than a motivational speech. Such leaders are not using the gate but crawling over the walls and endangering the flock. God protect us from that happening in our church.

So how do you know who you should be listening to? Jesus gives a simple litmus test: are they using the one gate. The one who enters the gate is the shepherd of the sheep (v.2). Those who come in Jesus' name speak with the voice of the shepherd. They direct away from themselves to the Good Shepherd Jesus because it's He who saves and brings us through the gate to safety. They understand it's Jesus who calls each sheep by their own name. This shows Jesus knows you on a deep and personal level. He knows the sufferings that you have dealt with. He knows the various animals of this world that have attacked you: the sicknesses and health problems, the relationship struggles, the fighting with doubt and everything in between.

He knows you by name because he put his name on you when you were baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So he doesn't beat you over the head or motivate you with the Law. Instead, **"He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice."** Your Good Shepherd wants to protect you. So he doesn't leave you to wander aimlessly through this world. He leads and guides you with his soothing voice of the Gospel. Instead of telling you, "Do this!" Your Good Shepherd tells you, "It's already done." He restores your starving soul with his life-giving Word. He welcomes you at the table he's prepared for you with the Lord's Supper forgiving your sins. Your Good Shepherd wants to keep you safe, so he sends other shepherds with his voice to point back to him. It might sound strange, but in my Bible Instruction/Information class, in some shape or form, one of the first things I say is, "I'm not here to try and make you a member of Zion Lutheran. If you choose to be after these lessons, we will be very happy. But that's not my job. My job is to show you Jesus as he speaks to us through the Word of the Bible."

At the same time, the sheep have a responsibility too. They need to pay attention to what they are hearing. They need to be on the lookout for those who try and climb over the walls. The church is vulnerable when the pastor is more interested in his own agenda than pointing to Jesus. The church is in danger when the members are not doing their own due diligence when listening to a pastor. Don't assume that because someone has that title they must be speaking the truth. The flock is vulnerable when their focus is more on dollars and cents in the offering rather than trusting God's promises. The church is vulnerable when individuals hold onto sins of the past and refuse to let go of grudges. The church is vulnerable when, instead of regularly hearing the voice of the Shepherd, one feels hearing it every now and then is "good enough." It happens when instead of fleeing from the stranger, you flee from the Good Shepherd because what he says isn't fitting your own personal agenda. The church is vulnerable when they are not careful with what they are listening to. The voice of the stranger stops sounding strange if you keep listening to it. When listening at another church body it's not only about what we agree on; pay attention to what is missing and where we are different.

You have a personal responsibility to know your Shepherd Jesus' voice. That means you need to be in His Word. You don't need to be a trained theologian. As you listen to the Good Shepherd's voice and study it, your ears become more attune. You know this. I've heard a number of people visiting other churches say, "It just didn't sound right." It wasn't just because there was a different pastor. You can hear when the truth is being watered down. You can tell when something is being added. You might be waiting for a certain point, but then you leave feeling empty and hungry for more.

We want to hear the Shepherds voice also because Jesus continues in v.7-10: **Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find**

pasture. ¹⁰ **The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.** Not only is he the Shepherd. He's the gate! Eternal life is through him. The way to green pastures of heaven always has been and only been through Jesus. Anyone who points to anything else is a thief and robber. It might make more sense to your reason. It might make you feel some personal pride. It might even make good citizens in society. But the thief only comes to steal and kill and destroy. The only one who gives us real life is Jesus. Jesus says, "I am the gate. I saved you."

From what, you might ask as you continue to be attacked and suffer in this world? You were a slave to sin and its desires. Self-seeking and self-serving you were dead in it. Death's steely chains had you in its grip. The devil's lies clouded your mind and controlled you. But Jesus suffered for you. He who committed no sin with no deceit in his mouth bore your sins on the cross where he paid that debt with his precious blood. By His wounds you have been healed. With His rising from the dead, you have new life. "I am the Gate," Jesus says, "Through me you have life and have an abundance of it. Sin does not control you. Death has no power over you. I crushed Satan's head for you. Yes, while on earth you will suffer for a time. But I'm watching over you. I am your Good Shepherd and I will be sure to bring you through that gate to be with me forever."

But Jesus doesn't make us part of the fold to hide behind our church doors. He sends us out to speak with his voice. There are many more he wants to bring into his sheep pen and uses you and me to do so. As it's all of our responsibility to hear his voice, it's all our responsibility to share that voice. And then we are done. He does the rest. He knows his sheep each on a far more personal, intimate level than us. We speak his Word and leave it to him to bring them into the fold.

Pray that God work in our hearts the desire to grow listening to his voice and sharing it. Pray that he continue to give us faithful pastors who point us to the one gate Jesus. Pray for me, your pastor. May God keep us in the true faith until we hear our Shepherd's voice calling us to the everlasting green pastures of Paradise. Amen.