

April 17, 2005
Easter 4

"Life to the Full with Jesus Your Shepherd"

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. ² The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. ³ 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. 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 they did not understand what he was telling them. ⁷ Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. 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.

"I have come that they might have life and have it to the full." With Jesus as your Shepherd life is always looking up. Goodness and mercy follows you all the days of your life. The cup of blessing you have in Jesus is not half empty or even half full, but always running over. There is a banquet table spread out in the presence of your enemies. You have life to the full because the Shepherd rescued you when you were lost. He took you into his loving arms and these arms will hold on to you through this life, through the doors of death, and on into eternity. "Nothing in all creation will ever separate you from the love of God that exists in Christ Jesus your Lord."

Satan cannot stand to watch the Shepherd gather his sheep from the sheep pen and lead them up to the green mountain meadows and cool water. He longs for night to fall when he can send a thief and robber into the sheep pen to grab the sheep and carry it off for food. How many people do you know, even from this congregation, who once enjoyed full abundant life with Jesus their Shepherd, but now they have been hauled off and are ready to be led away to the final slaughter on the last day?

This morning we want to direct you to this full abundant life you now have with Jesus your Shepherd. We want to talk to you about gamboling on the green, not gambling as people do in Las Vegas, but gamboling (GAMBOLING) which means to dance and prance and skip and jump in joy as a sheep may do when the shepherd leads them to mountain meadows.

1) Watch out for the robbers

Jesus warns about thieves and robbers who want to steal the sheep and destroy them. "I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter in by the sheep gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber."

Jesus spoke these words when he was visiting in Jerusalem for the autumn camping festival, the "Feast of Booths" also called Succoth. It was a happy time when people lived out in booths or tents to commemorate the rescue from the land of Egypt. During this festival time, Jesus told the people, "If anyone is thirsty let him come to me and drink." He told the Jewish leaders, he was more than just a good teacher when he made the bold claim for himself, "Before Abraham was I am." He told the people he was the Savior who would be lifted up to rescue people. They called him a devil.

To help these religious leaders see the error of their ways, Jesus used a story or picture of shepherds putting the sheep behind the safety of the sheep pen. The sheep pen had high stone walls with only one gate that guarded the entrance. The watchman on duty made sure that no one came in at night and stole some sheep. Jesus said, "The watchman opens the gate for him and the sheep listen to his voice." Someone climbing over the fence at night had only one purpose and that was to steal the sheep and slaughter them for food. Jesus loves his sheep. The last thing Jesus wants is to have some nasty thief or robber break into the sheep pen, steal sheep and keep them from the full abundant life he has planned for them in the green pastures of his love in this life and a place in the house of the Lord forever.

As Jesus walked through the temple courts during this festival, he could see and hear the false teachers teaching God's word incorrectly. People were being led like sheep to the slaughter. They were taught how God would love them and accept if they followed certain rules and regulations laid down in Old Testament law and in the teachings of the rabbis.

On another occasion Jesus tried to show how awful these false teachers were with the story of the lost son. Remember how the lost son planned to come home, work for his dad, and regain his position again in the family. The father did not say to the son, "It is about time you came home, son!" He did not lay down a set of rules and regulations that he could begin fulfilling to gain back his acceptance. Instead the father welcomed him home with open arms and put him back into the position of being his son. Jesus could not stand to sit back and watch the Jewish leaders tell the people they could be accepted by his heavenly Father by doing their best to fulfill Old Testament laws and extra rules and regulations added by religious teachers of the past.

Do you hear a noise, my dear Christian friends, isn't there a noise over there on the wall of sheep pen? Is that a robber sneaking in to steal the sheep and take them away from the shepherd? When the Apostle Paul said goodbye to the Christians in Ephesus he did so with tears because he was afraid of these robbers who would come into the sheep pen. He told the leaders, "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and not spare the flock." I recall hearing these chilling words from one professor at the seminary, "What is worse, robbing banks and killing people or teaching God's Word incorrectly?"

Jesus minced no words with these religious leaders who were robbing and stealing sheep. He told them, "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not hold to the truth, for there is no truth in him." What is the devil's biggest lie that kills and destroys people? Is it not the teaching that you must do something to contribute to your salvation to make God love you

and accept you. That is the basis or foundation for all religious beliefs in the world, except for the true teaching about Jesus the Shepherd.

Jesus has opened your eyes and mine to see how far we have wandered from him and how hopelessly lost we are without him. Isaiah was not exaggerating when he said, "All we like sheep have gone astray, we have all turned to our own way...." In Ezekiel 34 the Lord says, "My sheep have wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. There were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them." No religious leader in the course of human history has ever rescued the sheep by dying for them as Jesus has done. Every religion except the words of Jesus sets forth the same false hope that people can reach a level of acceptance on the basis of their performance, their sincerity and their desire to do the best they can. That is where you would still be this morning if the Shepherd had not come to you and brought you to put your trust in him.

2) Listen to the voice of the shepherd

If you are concerned about someone sneaking up to you in the middle of the night and taking you away from Jesus your shepherd, then you want the protection that comes from listening to the voice of the shepherd. Notice what Jesus said, "and the sheep listen to his voice." He also says, "He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out." The sheep follow the shepherd because they know his voice. They will run from the voice of a stranger but they run to the voice of the shepherd. When the shepherd comes to the sheep pen to gather his sheep from the others that are behind the gate, he only needs to call their names and they come to him. Dogs love to come running when their names are called, and even some cats will come when they hear their name called. Don't you hear the shepherd calling you this morning, "Ho, Brownie! Ho Blackie! Ho Steven! Ho David! Ho Mary! He calls us by name, we follow his voice and always with eager anticipation because we do not know for sure what special places he has chosen for us as we follow him this day, and the next day, and the following day. Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice and they follow me.." How comforting are the words, "He leads them out" and "he goes ahead of them." How many days has Jesus gone ahead of you and lead you out to see the faithful love he has for you? One day, two days, a half a year of your life? No every day, and today and tomorrow will be no different.

The religious leaders teaching the people did not have a clue regarding what Jesus was saying to them. "They did not understand what he was telling them." Does Jesus just walk away and shake his head in disgust? No, Jesus the loving shepherd, reaches out to them one more time. He switches the picture from that of the shepherd calling his sheep from the sheep pen, to the gate of the sheep pen. "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 comes through me will be saved."

To illustrate further what Jesus means by the words, "I am the gate," imagine for a moment that our God in his love and mercy would provide a cure for cancer. The cure would be a special room, a small room, with a soft, greenish colored light emanating from the walls that had special healing powers. A few seconds in that room would provide an instant cure and it would cost nothing. There is only one door that enters into that room and one door that exists. To be cured people need to enter the door that says enter, and go out the door that says exit. Once the word gets out that people are being cured, they

would come from all over the world to pass through that room. I am sure there would be knockouts or counterfeits where people would try to charge money. Jesus said, "I am the gate!" There is no other place we can go to have our sin wiped clean. Only the blood of Jesus will cleanse from all sin. Nothing else will get the job done.

Not only is Jesus the gate to eternal life, he is also the gate or door that leads to a much happier, more full, more abundant life on this earth. It says of the sheep that pass through him the gate, "He will come and go out and find pasture." Then he says, "I have come that they might have life and have it to the full." 1 Corinthians 2 speaks of the wonder and beauty of this new life we have in Christ with these words, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him."

We want to close this morning by having you look at the front of your bulletin. Notice the fields of lupines and Indian paintbrush. The problem with the flowers is they are here today but then gone tomorrow. The pastures the shepherd has for you are always green, the water is always fresh, and the life is always abundant and overflowing with his life. "I have come that they might have life and have it to the full!" Aren't you ready for another week of gamboling on the green with Jesus your shepherd?