

## **Written Copy: John 10:3-5 “Following the Voice of Our Good Shepherd”**

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Easter (Good Shepherd Sunday)

Sunday, April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023

### **Text: John 10:3-5**

<sup>3</sup> To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup> When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. <sup>5</sup> A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.”

### **The text’s intent**

Through this analogy Jesus shows that the Pharisees and religious leaders are not God’s shepherds of the flock but are thieves and robbers taking advantage of their position and power for themselves. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who entered the sheepfold by means of His fulfilling the Father’s plan of salvation by becoming the Lamb of Sacrifice that takes away the sin of the world. God’s flock are the Church, all who are made righteous by faith in His promises. Jesus is the door because it is by faith in His fulfilling of God’s promised salvation that the sheep find good pasture and still waters now in this fallen world and the perfect pasture of eternal life to come.

### **Focus Statement:**

Jesus proved He is worthy to be our Good Shepherd by His fulfilling perfectly the Father’s plan of salvation and therefore being the door into God’s Church-His sheepfold, through our faith in His life, death, and resurrection. In His leading us as our Shepherd, He provides us now with a life of refreshment by His gift of daily bread. Through His work in Word and Sacrament He provides the spiritual refreshment and restoration we need to keep going through the dark valleys of trial, temptation, and suffering. And when we stray, His Spirit calls us back through our repentant faith.

### **Function Statement:**

#### **Why it’s important to know:**

We who are called to be sheep sometimes balk at the “what and where” of our Good Shepherd’s leading, especially when it stands opposed to the desires of our sinful heart. We don’t want to walk down the paths of loving and serving others, especially those we don’t know or don’t like. We balk at the dark valleys He leads us to in order to give witness to our faith.

#### **What the hearer should do as a result:**

Listen to His voice calling us through Word and Sacrament. Respond with joyful and willing obedience. And when we do not turn in repentant faith to our loving Good Shepherd who always forgives and heals us by His life, death, and resurrection.

**Subject Sentence: Following the Shepherds voice means life now and eternal life to come.**

## **Introduction: Western Views of Sheep Herding Vs. Biblical**

When you think of herding sheep nowadays what picture comes to mind? Outside of the Bible we have a very “western” concept of tending sheep that is based on how it’s done here in America or in England. It usually involves the use of dogs who work to herd the flock and protect it when it’s out in the pasture. Hence the name of the breed “German Shepherd”, bred to fulfill the job of herding sheep in Germany.

Of course, if you have kids my age you might not always think of dogs, but instead of a pig. One of their favorite movies growing up was the 1995 Movie “Babe” in which a farmer trains a pig to do the job of herding the sheep, not by being ferocious or pushing his will upon them, but by speaking to them in their own language and moving them to obey his direction out of respect. Just so you know, although it made for a heartwarming movie, I have yet to see a sheep dog pig in real life.

I have seen a sheep dog replaced by a drone. It was on the Amazon Prime Series called “Clarkston’s Farm”. It’s a true-life documentary of Jeremy Clarkston who used to host a BBC Show about cars called “Top Gear”, and now hosts another car show on Amazon Prime called “The Grand Tour”. He knows a lot about cars, but nothing about farming. But after purchasing 3,000 acres which included an existing farm, he decided to switch gears and become a farmer. But his inexperience at being a farmer shows through in some hilarious ways.

He gets the idea that a good way to control the growth of grass in the fields he is not planting in would be to let the sheep graze it and fertilize it with their droppings. But he doesn’t realize that sheep are not the easiest to herd or care for, and they are not predisposed to obey him. When he wants to move them from one pasture where they had consumed all the grass to another one, they instead simply run away from him to another part of that same pasture. He then realizes why farmers have and use sheep dogs. But rather than spending the money on a fully trained sheep dog, he tries what he calls a more “modern” idea. He mounts a speaker on a drone he has, and through that speaker plays the pre-recorded sound of a dog barking. And it worked; at least at first. With the drone he is able to herd them from the spent pasture into a new one. But the sheep soon discover that this “drone-dog” was “all bark and no bite” and they simply ignore it. And when he tries to herd them himself, instead of going through the open gate into another pasture, they begin to jump over the waist high rock wall, destroying it, and head toward the road. It takes him, his helper, some neighbors, and some of the camera crew to get the sheep herded back into the pasture where they belong.

Contrary to popular belief sheep are not stupid. They are in fact very intelligent. But they have a strong flocking or herding instinct. They naturally band together in a flock for protection from predators. That means when one gets headed in the wrong direction, like over the wall and into the wrong field, the rest will follow. And they can be very stubborn.

## **Listening And Obeying Our Good Shepherd's Voice.**

For this reason, the description we have in our Gospel Lesson of sheep willingly and obediently listening to the voice of their human shepherd and following him may seem almost as far-fetched as pig assuming the role of a sheep dog. We might see Jesus' analogy of sheep obeying the voice of the shepherd as a quaint tale for a perfect world. So did Judith Fain, a doctoral candidate at the University of Durham until, as part of her studies, she spent several months each year in Israel. One day while walking on the road near Bethlehem, she saw three shepherds come together, each one leading their own separate flock of sheep. The three men stopped to talk with one another while their individual flocks seem to meld together into one big group. She watched, fascinated to see how each of these shepherds would ever be able to separate their individual flock from this whole mixed-up group. But as each shepherd parted, she saw each shepherd call out for his own sheep to come and follow him. And at the sound of each shepherd's voice, as if by magic, these sheep separated back into individual flocks and headed out following their individual shepherd. Imagine that! We see that Jesus in our Gospel Lesson really knows what He was talking about.

Our Gospel Lesson takes place with Jesus in Jerusalem. He is addressing not just His disciples, but the man that had been blind from birth who had his physical and spiritual eyes opened to see Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah. Along with him are the Pharisees who kicked the formerly blind man out of the synagogue for refusing deny Jesus worked this miracle that could only be done by the power of God. It is the Pharisees and the chief priests that Jesus is referring to when he says in **John 10:1 "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.** The sheepfold represents the place where God gathers His sheep, which are His children, who are made so by faith in His promises. For us that means the sheepfold is His Church. But these religious leaders were not entering by the door of faith in God's mercy and grace extended through the sacrificial system. Instead, they claimed fame, power, and influence according to the works they did: how well they kept the laws. They reveled in how the people looked up to them. And the priests, instead of helping the people make use of the sacrificial system in a God pleasing way, made money off the exchange of sacrificial animals in the temple courtyard, as well as cheating them when they came to exchange their money for the temple currency.

**John 10:2 But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.**

As Jesus will go on to point out He is the Good Shepherd who, unlike these religious leaders, enters by the door of faith. He showed Himself worthy by not only believing in the Father's promised plan of salvation, but willingly fulfilling it. He is the shepherd who gave up His life for the sheep so that all who believe in Him are welcomed into the Father's sheepfold as members of His flock. He gave up His life so that you are declared to be good enough to be a member of God's flock.

**John 10:3 To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.**

The gatekeeper, who is the Holy Spirit opens the door of your heart and mind to see and believe in Jesus as your Good Shepherd. He gives to you the power of faith by which you trust that Jesus is the one sent by God who provides for you the pleasant pastures that are your life today: food, clothing, house, home, possessions. Truly when God is our Father and Christ is our Good Shepherd, we do not lack nothing that is needed.

**John 10:4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.**

We know and believe in Jesus as our Good Shepherd, and we know and recognize His voice speaking to us in Scripture. We acknowledge Him by faith to be not just our Savior, but also our Lord, the one whose voice is worthy of our attention. Except when we don't.

In this passage, as well as others in Scripture, we are referred to as sheep for a good reason. Like sheep we can become obstinate to the Shepherd's voice and choose not to follow it. We are all for the Good News of the Gospel that our sins are forgiven, but when it comes to how we are to act as forgiven sheep of His flock, then our heads sometimes turn away. Like in our Epistle Lesson from 1 Peter where Jesus voice is speaking through the Apostle to warn us that there will come times when we must suffer unjustly. These are times when we didn't do anything wrong, remained obedient to His Word, yet the world hates us for it. Times when we stand firm in our faith that Jesus is the only way to the Father, the only way to eternal life, and yet the world berates us, calling us closed minded bigots and prejudiced, because we refuse to be accepting of other people's beliefs as truth alongside our faith in Jesus. And times are coming when we may be suffering persecution verbally, economically, as well as physically for our faith. Those are words I don't want to hear from my shepherd. Do you?

Jesus' voice calls us to stand firm in the Biblical witness that same sex lifestyles are contrary to God's will and plan for humankind, that He designated the basic building block for society to be man and woman when He created Adam and Eve and brought them together. And Jesus was there at creation when God created one male and one female to best equip them to serve Him in that perfect Garden. What He did not give them, or us, is the right to change the gender one is born with. And to do so amounts to one saying God got it wrong when He formed them in their mother's womb. He calls us to stand firm on this even though it may cause us one day to suffer for our beliefs in the court of public opinion.

But along with His call to give witnesses that these acts are sinful, He also calls on us to do so with love, care, and concern for the sinner. The voice of Jesus calls us to hate the sin while loving the sinner. And we struggle with this. We want to either hate both the sinner and the sin, or love and excuse both. This call from the voice of Jesus is not what we want to hear.

And further, He calls us to love everyone: our brother or sister when they sin against us, as well as those we consider our enemies. We would much rather keep a scorecard of the wrongs that have been done to us and get even first. But that is not what our Good Shepherd calls us to do. He calls us to throw the scorecard away because He is no longer keeping score. Jesus ripped up the score card when He gave His life on the cross. He calls us to love and forgive completely, just as He loves and forgives us when we fail to listen and follow these things that are hard for us to hear, yet alone do. He forgives all the times we fail to follow Him and instead follow our sinful heart's wants and desires.

## **He Forgives and Restores Our Soul in His Sheepfold**

That's why our Good Shepherd not only leads us out into the world to minister as His Church, but also leads us back into His sheepfold, back into the communion of saints that is His Church in worship around the Word and Sacraments. He leads us back here so that, along with being convicted of our disobedience to His voice, we can also hear once again His words of grace and forgiveness. He leads you back so that you can know that He is your Good Shepherd who, by laying down His life for you, His precious little lamb, has earned complete forgiveness for every time you disobeyed.

Through this wonderful Gospel Message, He restores you as a precious member of His Father's flock, who loves you just as much as He loves every single other member of His flock. And when He looks at you, there is no hatred or wrath, He poured all that out on your Good Shepherd on the cross. He looks at you with sacrificial and unconditional love, through the eyes of Jesus, who willingly gave His life for you and rose again so that you might be assured of your place in His flock, now and forever.

He strengthens you to go out again and follow Him in His paths of right living before the Father, in obedience to His call to love Him and love others with that same sacrificial and unconditional love that He has shared with you. He calls you to love others with the same kind of love the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Church shared in our First Lesson: looking at all that they'd been given as a gift from God, asking Him what He desires be shared with those in need, and giving as we are able. And most of all, our Good Shepherd wants you to know that every time you fail to walk this path with Him, every time you turn away from His voice, He is there to call you back, to gently turn you around, to forgive you, and to continue guiding you down the paths of life that are in right standing with God the Father.

## **Conclusion**

As David, the author of Psalm 23 well knew, along with Jesus who had this great Psalm in mind when He preached the message of our Gospel Lesson well knew: Yes, we are a lot like sheep at times. In fact, we are more like the disobedient sheep on Clarkston's farm than like the real sheep in Israel. We can be willfully disobedient. We can have a herd like mentality where we follow the herd of the world instead of following the path of righteousness that our Good Shepherd calls us to follow Him down. But He is our Good Shepherd who has come down among us to be the gate. He has come to protect us from wandering away into the world and away from our faith. And when we do begin to wander down unrighteous paths of disobedience to His voice, He reaches out through His word to call us back. He uses the darkness of those dark valleys: both the ones of our own sinful making, and the ones that are the result of living in a sinful world, to turn us away from following our sinful hearts and back to following Him. He comes to establish and keep strong a personal relationship with you, one where He knows you intimately as His precious sheep, and you know Him as your loving, forgiving, and abiding Savior. He uses no drones and no sheep dogs. He uses His Spirit given you in baptism who herds you by walking through life with you to guide you down the righteous paths that the Father has planned for you. And Jesus will make sure that the path that is your life leads your right to the doorway into eternal life to come. Amen.