

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Happy Good Shepherd Sunday! A careful reading of today’s lesson from John 10 might leave us with many questions. I’m sure that if I had questions, you have questions, too. What is Jesus talking about? That day when Jesus first spoke those words, His hearers didn’t understand what He was saying.

Jesus seems to make His words even more challenging by changing the metaphors. Is He the shepherd? Is He the door? Is He both? This can be rather confusing. And if you put all the metaphors together, you get the Lamb is the Shepherd who is the Door that marks the Shepherd who leads the sheep. Are you confused? But do not worry. With these very words, the Good Shepherd calls His flock to hear His voice and follow it all the way to abundant life!

First, let’s look at how Jesus uses the term shepherd. Jesus says, ***“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. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep”*** (John 10:1-2).

Before Jesus gets to the true shepherd, He speaks of false shepherds – those who enter the sheepfold by another way, who He calls thieves and robbers. For these people, it is thought that Jesus is talking about people like Judas the Galilean and Theudas, since they falsely claimed to be the messiah. These are the men that the Pharisee Gamaliel mentioned to his fellow members of the Sanhedrin when the council was growing tired of the Apostles’ witnessing and evangelizing to the bodily resurrection of Jesus. To this, Gamaliel said, ***“For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody... he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. After him Judas the Galilean rose up... he too perished, and all who followed him were scattered”*** (Acts 5:36-37).

Thieves and robbers were also used to designate the more violent messianic revolutionaries, as well. Barabbas comes to mind. He was referred directly as a robber by the gospel writers and Luke tells even more about Barabbas’ exploits as an insurrectionist and a murderer (Luke 23:19).

But another possibility that Jesus may be referring to are the Pharisees. Yes, those false messiahs convinced many people to follow them, but they all came and went. The real opponents of Jesus are the Jewish authorities and more specifically the Pharisees, since the Pharisees created new man-made laws as a worldly way to abide to God's Ten Commandments.

The one thing these thieves and robbers all have in common is that they all creep in secretly and use sweet words by pretending special faithfulness and love for the sheep. For Judas the Galilean, Theudas, Barabbas, and the Pharisees, they all desire to rule over the sheep with only human wisdom. They each teach human doctrines, precepts, and the worship of their works.

What about today? False shepherds are still with us. Any pastor who proclaims another apart from Jesus is a false shepherd. So, if a pastor says that Jesus is one shepherd among many or that God's Word is no longer sufficient in today's world, that pastor is a thief and a robber.

These false shepherds may have a following for a time, since humans are easily deceived. We are compared to sheep, after all. Although sheep have almost 360-degree vision without turning their heads, they don't have the best eyesight. So, sheep tend to follow the sheep that is in front of them. Even from birth, lambs are conditioned to follow the older members of the flock. This instinct is "hard-wired" into sheep. So, if one sheep jumps over the cliff, the others are likely to follow.

People are that way, too. We have a herd mentality. For what we perceive as the majority, influences how we think. Our sinful nature has a natural tendency to follow the crowd. We want to be the "cool" kid. Herd mentality is behind the must-have toys, the listing of preferred pronouns in email signatures, and the transgender craze.

As the Babylon Bee – a Christian parody website says of today's craze – "We're absolutely stunned by this. We can't begin to explain why young, impressionable kids who are desperate for popularity and affirmation are suddenly choosing to become members of the most popular and affirmed group in human history. Every single movie, TV show, corporation, TikTok influencer, YouTuber, public school teacher, pop star, and Hollywood star in the country openly promotes and celebrates this group. Why on earth would teenagers want to be a part of that? It must be biology."

This parody, which is more reality than not, is another example of herd mentality. Instead of buying toys and videogames, today's craze is questioning everything, including your own very being. If you desire to be liked, why wouldn't you want to be a part of the world's most celebrated group? This is what our sinful nature desires. It desires to be liked. And Satan uses this to his advantage.

These false shepherds are only popular for a time. They are fads. Some last a while, but in the long-run, they are all short lived. Eventually, they all come to nothing, because lies cannot be sustained forever, since the truth is always revealed.

But as we are like sheep with herd mentality, we are also like sheep when it comes to voice. Some time ago, a seminary professor visited two of his students who lived on a farm. While there, the students' father asked the professor if he would like to help call the sheep. The professor enthusiastically agreed.

"Go ahead," the father asked. "Call them in."

"What do you say?" the professor asked.

"I just say, 'Hey, sheep! Come on in!'"

The professor thought, well, this sounds pretty easy, so he began calling for the sheep, "Hey sheep! Come on in!"

As you likely expected, nothing happened. Not one sheep moved. But he tried and tried again. No change. Not even a sheep twitched an ear.

Jesus says the true Shepherd is known by His voice and He gives to the true Church this comfort: "***My sheep listen to My voice, but they do not know the voice of strangers***" (John 10:4-5).

As sheep, we may be deceived for a while, but in time we naturally know that something is wrong if the supposed shepherd is preaching doctrines against Jesus' Word, such as changes in morality. This is what has led so many Christians to seek out churches that do proclaim God's truth.

Faithful pastors sound the Shepherd's voice. They warn the flock of dangers. They cleanse and bind wounds with the Gospel.

The voice of Jesus is the voice of comfort in a morally decaying world. As sheep, we may not be really smart, but we know our Shepherd's voice. He calls us all by name. He cares for you, feeds you, and protects you. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who protects you and guides you through the dangers of this life all the way to life everlasting.

As the Good Shepherd, Jesus is not only the One who enters by the door, but He is also the Door Himself. Jesus says, ***"I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture"*** (John 10:9). Now, what to make of Jesus as the Door?

One way to think about it is that Jesus is the doorway. Now, don't think of a door with hinges that open and close. Think of a doorway. The opening by which people come in. Jesus is the only way people come into eternal life. And Jesus isn't blocking people from eternal life. We do that on our own through unrepented sin and unbelief.

Jesus is the Door, the one and only exclusive entrance to eternal life. All who enter through Him are saved and find pasture. On our own, we are stray sheep, who are destined to the slaughter, which is what we deserve due to our sins. But through Jesus becoming Man for you, suffering, and dying as the Sacrificial Lamb for the sins of the world, and rising to life on the third day, all who trust in Him are given the gift of eternal life. The Good Shepherd has nothing but selflessness at heart.

As we live in a fallen, sinful world, we sheep need sustenance to keep going. God does all the saving, and He credits that to us by faith. We have the Shepherd who guides us to the calm waters of Holy Baptism where He calls you by name. We have the Shepherd who speaks to us through His written Word – the Bible. We have the Shepherd who prepares a table before you as He feeds you His body and blood under the bread and the wine for the forgiveness of your sins. We have the Shepherd whose cup of grace overflows.

Christ, the Good Shepherd, seeks to bring His sheep eternal life. He doesn't just get us through day by day, but beyond this life, so that you shall have life and have it abundantly in the house of Lord forever. Jesus is the Shepherd and the Door of the Sheep! Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

**+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +**