

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Fourth Sunday of Easter - Year A

Week 8 of Quarantine

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Acts 2:42-47

Psalm 23

1 Peter 2:19-25

John 10:1-10

05/05/2020

Gospel

1970 NET Translation

The Holy Gospel according to St. John:

10:1. 'In truth I tell you, in very truth, the man who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs in some other way, is nothing but a thief or a robber. 2. The man who enters by the door is the shepherd in charge of the sheep. 3. The door-keeper admits him, and the sheep hear his voice; he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out. 4. When he has brought them all out, he goes goes ahead and the sheep follow, because they know his voice. 5. They will not follow a stranger; they will run away from him, because they do not recognize the voice of the strangers.' 6. This was a

parable that Jesus told them, but they did not understand what he meant by it. 7. So Jesus spoke again: 'In truth, in very truth I tell you, I am the door of the sheepfold. 8. The sheep pay no heed to any who came before me, for these were all thieves and robbers. 9. I am the door; anyone who comes into the fold through me shall be safe. He shall go in and out and shall find pasturage. 10. The thief comes only to steal, to kill, to destroy; I have come that men may have life, and may have it in all its fullness.'

The Gospel of our Lord.

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

The Shepherd

Good morning! If it's not obvious, I'm not a farmer. Animal husbandry isn't a skill that I have. In terms of animals, my experience is rather limited. When I was born we had a cat named Chris. She was more my sister's cat than mine though. The only pet I had growing up was a hermit crab, which didn't require much work. As we got older we got another cat that was literally insane and eventually ran away. Then we found Ace, who was a sick little guy we found at our family business. You'll notice that I never had a dog, and that was quickly remedied when Megan

and I were living at seminary when we got the one and only Ned. So, when it comes to animals, I don't have much experience being a shepherd. Hermit crabs don't really need herding, and cats, well there is a reason we have the expression "it's like herding cats." Ned, like most dogs, is the exact opposite of a cat and follows me around the house wherever I go. I don't think it's technically herding when your dog follows you without any prompting.

I don't think I'm alone in having a tough time connecting with the shepherding of this Gospel reading. There may be a few of you who grew up on a farm, but for the most part, the ins-and-outs of shepherding are lost on us. In fact, I would imagine that the stories found in scripture are the main source of our familiarity with shepherding. It's the Christmas Eve play that comes to mind, or the image of Jesus holding the innocent little lamb.

We usually try to connect to this story through the role of the shepherd, especially so for pastors, who take to heart the words of I Peter 5:1b-3 to heart: "*I exhort the elders among you **2** to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight,[a] not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it[b]—not for sordid gain but eagerly. **3** Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock.*" I'm a particular fan of my predecessor, Pastor Chris', analogy. We're

more like the herding dog that accompanies the shepherd, taking direction from Jesus Christ, taking the lead after being directed.

But all of these outlooks fail for one spectacular reason. That's because WE are the sheep, all of us. We're like those cute little goats that whenever they get startled they freeze up and faint. We need someone to watch over us! This lesson from the Gospel of John isn't about us at all, it's about Jesus Christ. If we were in the sanctuary I would turn to Sue in the choir and say: "Sue! Who is the subject of the active verb?!" And she would be annoyed but answer correctly "God." The lesson that was drilled into my head by my own pastor growing up is shown right here. The story of scripture is first and foremost about God's redeeming work in the world.

We see that work here in this story. Jesus says: *"10:1. 'In truth I tell you, in very truth, the man who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs in some other way, is nothing but a thief or a robber. 2. The man who enters by the door is the shepherd in charge of the sheep."* There is only one way through that gate, and that door only opens for the shepherd. Our sin once made entrance impossible, but Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, calls us each by name. *"4. When he has brought them all out, he goes ahead and the sheep follow, because they know his voice. 5. They will not follow a stranger; they will run away from him, because*

they do not recognize the voice of the strangers.” If you have ever tried to get a stray animal to come to you, then you understand this analogy. We know the shepherd in different ways, sometimes it's through a voice, a calling, but other times we see with our eyes the one who is protecting us. Other times we trust in those around us who might be a little taller and see the shepherd's direction, or who have better hearing to catch God's voice.

But like sheep, sometimes we need help understanding things, and Jesus breaks it down for us again: *“So Jesus spoke again: 'In truth, in very truth I tell you, I am the door of the sheepfold. 8. The sheep pay no heed to any who came before me, for these were all thieves and robbers. 9. I am the door; anyone who comes into the fold through me shall be safe. He shall go in and out and shall find pasturage.”*

In a time when it seems like leadership in so many places has failed us, these words in the Gospel of John remind me that no human power will ever give us everything we need. Our Gospel text finishes with these words: *“I have come that men may have life, and may have it in all its fullness.”* This is the hope that we can turn to in times of uncertainty and doubt. God is committed to protecting us, the Shepherd is so set on this that the shepherd will die to save us sheep. And from that death comes the promise

of eternal life. God loves us in ways we'll never understand. Man, what a message of hope in a time where we all need a little assurance. Amen.