

He Leads Them

John 10:1-10

The Fourth Sunday of Easter, May 7, 2017, Confirmation Day

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

The one who enters the sheepfold by the door is the one who does his vocation appropriately. The one who does not enter the sheepfold by the door is the one who does not do his vocation appropriately. He is either doing it wrong or he is doing a vocation that he should not be doing. The one who does his vocation appropriately is the shepherd of the sheep. The one who does his vocation inappropriately is taking something that does not belong to himself and is therefore a thief and a robber. The one who enters the sheepfold by the door is the shepherd of his sheep. The sheep listen to his voice. He leads them out. They follow Him. He leads them to good pasture. He leads them to salvation.

The sheep that does not listen to the voice of the shepherd is not a sheep of the shepherd. The sheep that listens to the voice of someone else is not the sheep of the shepherd. They are following a thief and a robber. The shepherd does not lead them. They will not find pasture.

Now here is the problem. The thieves and robbers against whom our shepherd warns us are people who claim to be Him or who claim to speak on His behalf. They do not speak on His behalf. They are not Him. But they claim to be these things.

The sheep that listen to them may think that they are listening to the shepherd, but they are not listening to the shepherd. They are therefore not the sheep of the shepherd. They do not follow Him. He does not lead them into the good pasture of salvation.

This is why I have preached the sermons that I have preached for the past two Sundays. It is so you can tell the difference between the good shepherd and those who claim to be the good shepherd. It is so you can tell the difference between those who come through the door of the sheep and those who climb in some other way. It is so you can tell the difference between those who fulfill their vocations appropriately and those who do not fulfill their vocations appropriately.

That is also why I have taught you junior catechesis. It is also why our congregation offers junior and adult catechesis. It is so you can distinguish between the voice of your good shepherd and the voice of the thieves and robbers who seek to steal, kill, and destroy.

It is easy to follow the voice of another. I learned at pastors conference this week that in 1959 or 1960 (the conference speaker gave both years), a professor from the seminary from which I graduated published a book endorsing Planned Parenthood. In the 1960s there were publications of commissions of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod indicating that abortion was a woman's individual choice thereby isolating her from her family and congregation, in particular from her husband or the father of the child she was carrying. And it is not like the author of the publication was a liberal. He believed in a six day creation. He believed that Noah's flood actually happened. He believed that God parted the Red Sea for the Israelites. Why then did he write a book endorsing Planned Parenthood? Why did our Missouri Synod leadership publish documents that left abortion up to the woman without giving her any help or aid in a dreadful decision with consequences which will haunt her for the rest of her life? In this area of our ecclesiastical life we quit listening to the voice of our shepherd. As the conference speaker put it, "conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary" should have been enough for us, but we were not listening. What he meant by that was the fact that our Lord entered into the world by conception and the womb had sanctified those means of bringing humans into the world. To put it crassly if conception and gestation and birth were good enough for the Lord then they are good enough for everyone else also.

We were not listening to the voice of our shepherd when He instructed us on His entrance into the world. We therefore failed to protect those who were entering in the same way to say nothing of the mothers of the children. And it is not some obscure passage from two thirds of the way through Jeremiah or Ezekiel which we were ignoring. We were ignoring the very creed that we recited in those days every Sunday.

This is why I taught you the catechism. This is why you are not done with the catechism. This is why you are not done with Divine Service. This is why you are definitely not done with the Bible. You are just getting started. I taught you the catechism so that you would be able to distinguish between the shepherd's voice and the voice of a thief and a robber. You will need to continue to maintain your ability to distinguish between the voice of your shepherd and the voice of others. If pastors and professional theologians fall into temptation of the devil and fail to listen to the voice of their shepherd, how much more junior catechumens newly confirmed.

The shepherd goes ahead of the sheep to lead them. The sheep hear His voice and follow Him. They do not follow Him if they are not listening to His voice. And Jack and Jack here is a truth to which I want you to pay careful attention. There are some people who have stopped listening to the voice of their shepherd and they admit it, but the majority of people who have stopped listening to the voice of the shepherd still believe that they are listening to the voice of the shepherd. They say that they are following Jesus, but they really aren't.

Most of such people were baptized, just like you were. Most of such people were confirmed, just like you are today. Many of such people attended youth Sunday School and even participated in youth group. But then when they reached young adulthood, they stopped listening to the voice of their shepherd. When they stopped listening to the voice of their shepherd, they stopped following Him because His voice is what causes them to follow Him. When you stop listening to the voice of the shepherd you automatically start listening to the voice of the serpent. There are only two options. There is no middle ground. They followed the voice of the serpent, but they thought they were following the voice of the shepherd. They said, "I believe the Bible," but were unaware of what it said except in a few places. They said, "I believe in Jesus," but did not know the basic message of Jesus and assumed that His message was something other than what it really was. Such people who have quit listening to the voice of their shepherd are often shocked when the shepherd begins speaking to them. They are surprised at what the Bible actually says. They are surprised at what their shepherd says and where He is leading them. It is because they have quit listening to the voice of their shepherd. And it is really hard for those people to come back to the shepherd and resume listening to His voice. Shocked and outraged by some things that the shepherd has said, they do not come back.

Let this not happen to you. It is easier simply to listen to the voice of your shepherd and not quit to begin with than to fall away and come back.

And your shepherd is leading you into good pasture. He is leading you into good pasture not only in the life to come, but also in this life. The life of sanctification is a life that expresses right now aspects of what life will be like in the new creation. In the new creation we will all be sinless. The sanctified life that Jesus leads you into is simply a life that begins to express that sinlessness now. Jesus leads such person into putting off their sin and to increase in the fruits of righteousness. He is leading His sheep into the abundant life even know before they get to its fullness in the age to come.

And so we have some unfortunate ways of speaking. "Only the good die young," while catchy and in a song, is a wrong way of speaking. "No good deed goes unpunished," is a cynical way of speaking and ultimately untrue. Take it from a man who has made his entrance into his middle aged

years, I regret and still experience the bad results of the sins that I committed at your age and in the years just a little older than your age. Those are the ones that still affect me negatively today. I yearn for the life that I could have had had I not done those things when I was your age and a little older. As one who suffers each day as the result of my own sins, I plead with you to listen to the voice of your shepherd. The other voices will lie, kill, and steal. The other voices do not seek your good. And while the things that the Good Shepherd says to you are hard to take, He never lies to you. He always tells you the truth so that you may follow Him.

If you do not heed the Shepherd when He tells you to repent, then you will not be listening to Him long enough to hear Him tell you that you are forgiven. If you do not listen to your Shepherd when He tells you how depraved your life has been and the evil that you have done, you will not listen long enough for you to hear Him say, "It is all forgiven."

If you listen to Him while He is saying the harsh truth of what you have done and who you have been, then you will be able to hear Him say, "Your sins are forgiven."

That means that if you do wander off and follow a thief and a robber and quit listening to the voice of your shepherd, you may always come back. The consequences in this life will not go away, but they will be lessened and the consequences in the life to come will be altered from eternal damnation to the good pasture that the shepherd is leading you into.

Ask your parents who perform their vocations appropriately. Ask them about their sins. Ask them about the consequences that they have experienced as a result of those sins. Ask them about their joy in the grace of God. They will tell you. Ask anyone in this congregation older than you who performs their vocation appropriately about their sins and the consequences they pay. They may not want to tell you because you are not their children, but they might tell you. And they will tell you about the shepherd's voice speaking His forgiveness to them.

The sheep of Jesus can tell the difference between a thief and the good shepherd. They will listen to the voice of their shepherd. They will not listen to the voice of another.

Jesus is the access point to salvation. The others only kill, steal, and destroy. Only Jesus is the access point to salvation.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Also it needs to be preached the vow until death and why that is there. We do not know what kind of life the confirmands will lead after they are confirmed. It might be a quiet, peaceful life or it might end in martyrdom. The reality is that it will probably wind up somewhere in between those two.

People my age worry about young people and the world that they will grow up in. We old people are often unspecific about what we mean by that. Perhaps some of us are not really worried at all, but since everyone else is saying it we say it too. Or perhaps we are simply lamenting the fact that things aren't as good as they used to be and we miss the good old days. But for those older people who are listening to the voice of their shepherd and because they are listening He leads them out and they find pasture, they are concerned that the world in which you will grow up and perform the callings to which God will call you will have much more temptation in it to discontinue your attention to the Shepherd's voice than did the world in which we grew up.

If you do not listen to the voice of the Shepherd, you do not follow Him and He cannot lead you. If you quit listening to the Shepherd's voice, you will quit following Him and He cannot lead you. If He cannot lead you, you will not find pasture with Him. You will not find life nor will you find it to the full.

There are so many other voices that vie for your attention. They want you to listen to them and not to the Shepherd. They want to lie to you and thus steal from you and in murder you with God's justice and judgment. The good Shepherd is leading you toward salvation. He is the entry point, the door, to salvation. Therefore it is necessary for you to distinguish between the voice of the good shepherd and the voice of strangers, between the one who enters by the door and the one who climbs in some other way. That is why I have preached the sermons that I have preached for the past two Sundays. That is also why I have taught you junior catechesis.