

## The Fourth Sunday of Easter

### Text: John 10:1-10 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup>“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. <sup>2</sup>The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup>But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a strangers voice.” <sup>6</sup>Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them. <sup>7</sup>Therefore Jesus said again, “I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. <sup>8</sup>All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. <sup>9</sup>I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. <sup>10</sup>The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

### *Jesus Is the Door*

We live in a country in which we are very blessed to have the freedom of religion. There are many countries today in which you risk imprisonment and even worse if you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior. However, in our country we have been blessed that the government is not allowed to prevent the free exercise of our faith, but as with every good thing, the devil tries to stir the pot too.

There is probably no nation that has ever has as many sects and cults as the United States because of our liberal policies with regard to the freedom of religion. In the 1800's CFW, the founder of our synod, once remarked with regard to this in a sermon, **“Here as nowhere else the land is filled with a countless host of heterodox sects, who are often surrounded by such a deceiving and holy appearance that even those who are really concerned about their soul’s salvation can easily be deceived and led on byways dangerous to their soul.”**<sup>1</sup>

There were hundreds of groups that sprung up during that period, such as the Millerites. William Miller was a farmer from New York who believed that he had figured out from the Bible when Jesus would return. He preached to about 1 million people over the course of the years, and over 100,000 of them believed his message. He preached that true Christians would ascend into heaven on October 22, 1844. Thousands of people sold their possessions and went to the hilltops, but nothing happened. Among other things that the Millerites believed was that the citizens of the United States were God's chosen people and that Jesus Christ's arrival would prove this point. The sun rose on October 23, and October 22 became known as the Great Disappointment by the Millerites.

Another group in this era was the Oneida community, which was founded by John Humphrey Noyes. He wanted to found a perfect community on this earth, which was just like heaven. Because there is no marriage in heaven, there was no marriage in the Oneida community. They practiced “complex marriage” which meant that all the men were married to all the women. Another group of that era was the Shakers, which was founded by Mother Ann Lee. They also believed that they could become perfect, but unlike the Oneida community, they practiced a strict celibacy and because of it, they

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<sup>1</sup>*Selected Sermons*, page 31

eventually died out. Other groups that were founded in that era are the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century it was Cyrus Scofield who brought the teachings of dispensationalism, millennialism and the rapture to worldwide prominence. In the 1970's and 80's many cults such as the Hare Krishna's, Jim Jones, and the Branch Davidians began to pop up. The latter 20<sup>th</sup> century also brought the rise of the prosperity gospel which promises that if you really believe, then your life will go great.

We hear all kinds of voices, which claim to be the voice leading us to salvation on television, radio, books and magazines, and even knocking on our doors. The question is, which of those voices are the voice of Jesus, and which are leading us to destruction. Today Jesus shows that the voices that lead us through Him are the true ones because He is the door to life.

#### I. What do the parts of this parable mean?

The shepherds are pastors. Jesus says in verse 2, "*He who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.*" The word "pastor" is a Latin word which means "shepherd." It is an imagine that is often used in the New Testament. In Acts 20:27 Paul told the Ephesian pastors, "*Be shepherds of the church of God, which He bought with His own blood.*" In Peter's first letter he writes, "*Be shepherds of God's love that is under your care.*" (1 Pt 5:2) A pastor enters by the door. He is called by Christ through Christ's people. A man does not become a pastor by his own choosing. The New Testament always shows that pastors are called by God through a body of believers. Pastors are men whom God has called to feed His flock with His Word and Sacraments.

Jesus is the door. He says in verse 7, "*Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.*" The point is very similar to chapter 14 when He says that He is the way, the truth, and the life." When sheep would be dragged over the wall by robbers, they were stolen to be killed and destroyed. However, when they were led from the safety of the pen through the door, they were led to pastures where they could feed. Jesus is way to eternal life. You might say that the sheep pen is like the church, and that the green pastures are heaven. We are directed to go through Him to enter that eternal life. He gives us the abundant life both in this world and in the one to come.

The thieves and robbers are false teachers. They do not direct us to Jesus. They dilute God's Word with their own dreams and ideas. They think only of themselves. In 1 Peter, Peter tells pastors not to be greedy or bossy, but to serve their flock as Christ has served us. (1 Pt 5:2,3) Those are two great marks of false teachers. They often become rich at the expense of their congregation or they tell their people that they have to obey them in all matters, even where the word of God is silent. The end of their work is to bring harm to God's people and His flock. One of the best examples of that is "The Great Disappointment," when possibly 100,000 people heeded William Miller's call to sell everything and meet the Lord. I wonder how many of those people ever listened to another preacher again.

## II. What is the point of this parable?

It is very simple. We want to be sure that we are led through the door. We want to be led through Christ. That means:

We learn to know our Savior's voice. We hear Jesus' voice as we listen to the Scriptures. We teach our children Jesus' voice as we share the Scriptures with them. The whole Bible points us to Jesus Christ as our Savior. It shows the price that He paid for our salvation on the cross. We look at our own lives and realize that we have failed, but He reminds us that He paid for our sins. We could be very anxious and worry and fret about so many things, but He reminds us that He is with us always to the end of the age. We grieve and mourn and even tremble at the thought of our own death. His voice reminds us that as He rose from the dead, so we will live forever. His voice tells us that He is the Savior that we can always count on. As we listen to the Bible we learn to recognize the voice of our Good Shepherd.

It also means that we watch out for thieves, the false teachers. Did you ever listen to a preacher on television or read something in a magazine or book which didn't seem quite right. Sometimes you know it right away. Other times you know that it doesn't sound right, but you are not quite sure what is wrong. The big test is whether you are being directed to Christ and His redemption or not. If we are not being directed to the cross of Christ, then the voice that we are hearing is that of a false teacher. The Lord warns us to get away. He shows us here that we have a responsibility. When He returns, "I was just doing as my pastor said," will not be a valid excuse. CFW Walther says with regard to this in *Church and Ministry*, "**Every believer for the sake of his salvation must flee all false teachers and avoid all heterodox congregations or sects.**"<sup>2</sup> This is an important responsibility that the New Testament often talks about, that we as Christian have the duty to judge what we hear with the Scriptures. Paul wrote to Timothy that the time will come when people will gather teachers around them to tell them what their itching ears want to hear. (2 Tim 4:3) As Christians we need to be careful that what we listen to is not what we like, what is most entertaining or even what is most persuasive. We want to listen to that which directs us to Christ. The other voices are out to destroy us. Those which lead us to Christ's cross, lead us to salvation.

There are many dangerous religious movements in our country yet today, but there are many blessings. One of them is that Bibles are so easy to attain. It is easy for us to compare what we hear with the Scriptures. May the Lord gives us eyes that search the Scriptures and ears that learn the Savior's voice from them, that we may be led to Christ, for His cross is the way to life to its fullest now and life eternal in the glory of heaven.

Amen.

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<sup>2</sup>*Church and Ministry*, Thesis 8,C, page 113