**John 10:1-10 (ESV)**

“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. **2** But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. **3** To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. **4** When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. **5**  A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” **6** This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. **7** So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. **8** All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. **9** I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. **10** The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. A natural law of life is to appreciate the care of our mothers. If anything, they brought us into this world. Yet, God knows what is unnatural for all to see is the care He gives. If anything, there is offense over God sending His Son to save a world full of sinners. Our text today from the Gospel is what Jesus spoke immediately after He healed the man born blind. The Pharisees denied God’s grace was at work in His Son so they said, “Are we also blind?” Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains” (John 9:40-41). Of course, their guilt kept getting in the way of God’s forgiving Word. Jesus alone was the true shepherd and door of the sheep.

The shepherd and sheep theme is a common illustration we find throughout the Bible. It directs our attention to the relationship Christ has with His baptized. Sometimes this emphasis is on Jesus showing the need for having a Shepherd. “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Matthew 9:36-38). At other times, like today, we have a picture showing the value and power of the shepherd’s Word. The whole point is to keep His sheep safe in Him alone.

Enemies of the cross do not care about the door or the sheep. Jesus sets the tone for His ministry. The Father sent the Son to save a sinful world. He said, “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 distinction between thief and robber is important to note. Thieves work by deception and trickery to get what they want. Robbers are outright violent in character and use force to get what they want. These false shepherds do not use the door because it is not in their best interest. Jesus tells us about the outcome of such falsity saying, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.” What the Pharisees missed is that they were pushing people away from God’s Son, the Word made flesh come to save sinners.

There are plenty of enemies still trying to find a way to the sheep. This is why baptism reminds us we belong to Christ. “The sheepfold or pen was a yard with a high stone wall to keep out wild animals and other intruders” (Bul’s notes). Christ made His Church to be a safe place for His people, but the Word and Sacraments are under attack. Some violently want to force or shame you as the sheep into another religion or different philosophy for life. Others more craftily shape a message to give comfort built on success, self-improvement, or God has done His part now it is up to you. Yet, all these enemies have the same problem. They deny using the door. Jesus is the door. He took His holy life and made it a sacrifice of love. Enemies of the sheep preach a Christ without a cross, deny His work of grace alone, and seek glory for self only to flee at the sight of danger.

As the sheep, you follow Jesus for He is the door giving life in His Name. Only His Word makes sense to the sheep. It is the defining mark of this shepherd. “When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.” It is hard to find many that follow much of anything today. Businesses try use incentives, government make new laws, and some negotiate other deals. Yet, following has always been the way of life for those holding fast to Christ because He knows you by name. Luther tells us, “Now, Christ’s wish is that none be forced, but that they be permitted to follow from willing hearts and of their own desire; not out of fear, shame or strife…Then let us see to it that we allow the pure Word of God to take its course, and afterward leave them free to follow, whom it has taken captive; yea, they will follow voluntarily” (Postils, Vol. 2 381-382).

You follow none other but Jesus. All preachers of His Word die, but Jesus keeps doing what He does best. He is the door of life that laid down His life for the sheep. The good shepherd’s voice is now the “open sesame” extending forgiveness and life in Him. Flee anything else for it is foreign to the Gospel God gives. Only Jesus faced the judgment of sin and death to save His sheep. Only He glorifies a true and perfect victory in the cross. Only His promise remains while works fail to give any comfort. Following is not so hard, since it rests on Jesus going before us. He knows each of you His sheep by name along with all your problems and pains. St. Peter says, “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.” Only through Jesus is the door secured not just for a lifetime, but forever in Him because His Word remains.

Better than the door, Jesus is the good shepherd who lives and reigns for His sheep. Enemies of the cross cannot match His faithfulness risen from the dead. Preachers of His Word only proclaim Him as the way, truth, and the life. His Sheep follow Him for He leads them to find pasture of spiritual food for the soul. The Pharisees full of their own selfish ambitions and sinful ways denied this good shepherd to be any good. Yet, He stands at the center of His Church giving salvation, freeing from sin, rescuing from death, and putting to shame the Devil. There may be individual sheep but early Christians never saw this to be each off in his own way. “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." The good shepherd cared for the whole flock and that was their joy and comfort.

Around Word and Sacrament, Jesus gives what He promised to His sheep. “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” False preachers and teachers look to this as what Christianity can achieve right now. Like the Pharisees, it leads to missing out on the good confession of Jesus for sinners. The truth that God has taken away death’s sting by His sacrifice and One man will open the book of Life on the Last Day. This is abundant life as God sees it for Jesus is the good shepherd. He comes to renew you, feed your faith, and turn blind eyes to see how He has already made things perfect in Him. Sheep pretty much listen in order to follow for there is no other way of life. By Jesus’ sacrifice marking the door and through Him being the good shepherd, salvation is secure now and forever in His Name. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.