

Sermon Draft

Text: John 10:11–18

Sermon: Our Shepherd

Our Gospel text from John 10 is a passage that provides pure, beautiful, unadulterated comfort to the suffering Christian conscience. There, in the words of our text, we learn that Jesus is our Good Shepherd. He defends us against the attacks of the wolf (the devil). He sticks beside us and will never leave us as would a hired hand (a faithless shepherd, a faithless pastor). He does this even laying down his life of his own accord, and because he does this he is worthy of the Father's love.

The First Reading gives us the impetus to teach and proclaim the Gospel, especially since *“there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12). We can follow the example of the apostles, who were preaching and teaching in spite of the fact that it *“greatly annoyed”* the rulers (4:2).

The Epistle encourages us to follow the example of love put forward by Jesus, our Good Shepherd, and likewise lay down our lives for one another (1 John 3:16).

There's a wonderful thing about a Good Shepherd: he lays down his life for the sheep. There's a funny thing about a door: it has two sides. There's a blessed thing about Jesus: Jesus is both the Good Shepherd and a door.

In our text today, Jesus teaches that he is the Good Shepherd. But a few verses earlier, Jesus also taught that he is the door of the sheep:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly”

(10:7–10). Jesus is both the Good Shepherd who protects His sheep and the Door that locks out those who threaten us.

It's a good thing about the Good Shepherd who's also a door: there are those two sides. On one side of the door, there's grace and mercy. There's a good and loving shepherd who cares for his sheep. He opens to provide food and nourishment as he leads the sheep to pasture and streams of living water. But he closes to provide protection from thieves and hired hands and wolves, the terms Jesus uses in our text for false shepherds: ***"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them"*** (vs 11–12). On one side is mercy, but on the other side is judgment.

In today's First Reading, Peter and John stood before the Jewish council, those who should have been the shepherds of Israel, but the apostles were on trial because they'd been proclaiming resurrection in the name of Jesus.

The council was greatly annoyed, so Peter and John must account: *“Let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well”* (Acts 4:10). Peter went on to explain that Jesus is the stone that was rejected but has become the cornerstone and that there is *“no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”* (4:12).

Some of the same false shepherds had revealed their true colors immediately before our text. In John 9, Jesus healed a man who was blind from birth. The Jews took issue with this healing because it had been done on a Sabbath Day. Jesus did not respect their laws, so they rejected him and refused to believe in him. They threw the man who’d been healed out of the synagogue. However, when Jesus found him and revealed to him that he was the Christ, the man believed in Jesus and worshiped him. The Good Shepherd was his open door—but a closed door to those who rejected him.

Think of it like the door that at God's command Noah and his sons built into the ark. On the day it started to rain, Noah and his family huddled inside the ark. The hand of God then closed that door. As the door shut, the rain that fell for God's judgment on the earth was kept safely outside. For Noah and his family, for those who had faith and believed God, the door provided protection.

And then, when the flood subsided, and the waters were gone, the door opened, and Noah went out to find God's blessing on the earth. The door shut for protection and opened for blessing. But for those outside the ark, that door meant judgment. The door was shut to those who did not believe. They perished. It's the same door, but that door is received much differently depending on which side of the door you're facing.

The same can be said for Jesus. Those of us who believe are on the inside of the door. For us, Jesus is the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for us. He knows us and loves us, and likewise we know him and follow him.

We know the sound of his voice and follow where he leads. But for those who do not believe in Jesus, he is a harsh judge. They are blind and unable to see his goodness and mercy. They reject him. They reject him and those who believe in him. The formerly blind man was put out of the synagogue because he confessed faith in Jesus. Peter and John were arrested for teaching and healing in the name of Jesus.

So also, for us, as we go in and out and follow Jesus, hearing his Word and recognizing his voice, following him to green pastures and living waters, being defended against wolves and thieves and hirelings, being gently prodded back to the green pastures and away from danger. We will receive Jesus as our Lord and master, as our Good Shepherd.

But since he is rejected by the outside world, they will also reject us. The world will see us and associate us with the judgment of Jesus. They will hate us and try to silence us even as the Jews hated Peter and John and the man born blind.

But we are safe. Just as Noah was safe from the wind and waves and flood as the waters rose to destroy the earth, likewise we are safe from God's judgment. Just as Noah and his family were protected from the waters that rose to destroy the earth, we are protected from the wrath of God. Just as sheep who are tucked safely away inside the sheepfold are protected from the dark of night and wolves that lurk in the shadows, we are protected from the devil and his evil angels.

We are safe inside the Church, where God feeds and nourishes us. We hear his voice through the preaching of his Word. We drink from the living water that flows from his font. We eat the food that he's prepared at his banquet table, bread and wine that is body and blood and that offers us forgiveness of sins, life, salvation.

Remember the old game show Let's Make a Deal? The contestants were given some prize and then had the opportunity to trade that prize for what was hidden behind a door. The show was exciting and entertaining because you never knew if that prize hidden behind the door was something of greater value, like a new car or a dream

vacation, or whether it was something worthless. Jesus, the door of the sheep, beckons to us to come to him and enter through him, to knock so that he will open. In our hands, we hold the prizes of this earth—the world and all its glory. We are tempted with that theory that says the bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. We are tempted to reject Jesus and deny his gifts. But behind that door, on the other side of that door, lies heaven and all its glory, all the blessings of God almighty given for you. Come, enter through the door that is Jesus and find your Good Shepherd waiting for you.

Amen