

Good Shepherd Sunday

May 8, 2011

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

John 10:1-10

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

When my wife and I were expecting our first baby at one of the doctor's appointments we were told that the baby was old enough to start hearing noises. From that point on as we waited for our Katie to be born, Lisa would often ask me: "Don't you want to talk to the baby?" As silly as it seemed, there I was talking baby talk or sharing information about my day with my wife's belly. Every night I even had a couple of prayers I would say to our baby still inside the womb.

Although I felt foolish and silly at times, something special happened when Katie was born. She came into the world with a big stretch and yawn, and then was taken over to a table to be examined by the doctor and nurses. They were trying unsuccessfully to get Katie to open her eyes as they spoke to her and poked her a little. Then, I came over and spoke. Immediately, Katie opened her eyes and turned her head to me. I believe my voice was familiar to her - a voice that she had heard before - a voice she knew. And as our children get older the voice of their mom or dad often becomes even more of a comfort and security - a voice they will turn to - a voice they can follow and trust.

Today, I pray we also hear a familiar voice. I pray we hear it, turn to it, and always find comfort and security in this voice. I pray it is a voice we always follow and trust. This is the voice of our Good Shepherd. God's Word, from John 10, reminds us that: **The Good Shepherd Speaks to His Sheep.**

We have before us this well-known chapter where Jesus makes it clear that He is our Good Shepherd. When our Good Shepherd speaks special, wonderful things happen. More evidence of this truth was given in chapter nine as Jesus speaks to a blind man telling him to go wash and miraculously the man could see. But even better than physical sight Jesus spoke to this man and his eyes were opened to see Jesus as the Son of Man and Savior. It is this man who was once blind, the Pharisees who questioned Him, His disciples, and some other Jews who happened to be there to whom Jesus now speaks these words.

Jesus uses a couple of illustrations that would have been familiar. He uses pictures of a shepherd and his sheep. Do you know any shepherds? I do not recall any shepherds in any church I have ever belonged. This picture just isn't as familiar to us so I

pray we don't read past these illustrations without weighing the full impact these messages had when Jesus taught them. I pray we study carefully what Jesus is saying here as Jesus begins with an emphatic "Amen, Amen" or as it reads for us "***I tell you the truth.***" "***A man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber.***"

Jesus pictures people getting to the sheep by going over a wall designed to protect the sheep in a sheep-pen. Jesus calls anyone who comes to the sheep and doesn't use the gate a thief (one who steals quietly) or a robber (one who takes things by force). These men will go to great lengths - they will climb in from another place to reach the sheep. This is certainly a vivid picture of those who claim to be true leaders of God's people, but instead by their false teachings were nothing more than thieves and robbers. They tried to steal the people by fear and intimidation. They robbed people of hope, and forgiveness and life. "***Their teachings are but rules taught by men***" (Matt. 15). They placed unnecessary burdens upon the sheep and led many astray.

Contrast this now with the good shepherd speaking to His sheep: "***The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchmen opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.***" The Good Shepherd has a unique relationship with His sheep. He comes right through the gate. The watchmen even open the gate for him because he is there for the sheep. He knows his sheep. To the unfamiliar eye the sheep might all look the same, but not to the shepherd. He notices the distinct features of each individual sheep (their different color, shape, voice or habits). He calls them by name. He leads them out by going up ahead of them. He goes ahead to make sure the path is free from danger. The sheep, trusting the voice of this shepherd who knows them and cares for them, follow Him. At times more than one flock would end up grazing at the same watering hole. The traveler-by might wonder how they will ever be able to separate the two flocks again. Then, the shepherd simply speaks and his sheep follow. They turn to the familiar voice. They know the voice of their shepherd. Jesus says: "***But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice.***"

Even if we have never met or seen an actual shepherd and his sheep can't we capture the beauty of these pictures, and the relevance of these illustrations for us? Jesus is our Good Shepherd. He speaks to us, His sheep. He knows us and cares for us. At our baptisms He called each of us by name and brought us under His care. He keeps speaking His Word of truth to us. We grow to recognize His voice, to trust it more and more, to follow Him where He leads us. We learn to discern our Good Shepherd's voice from strangers who speak falsely, from doctrines that are not familiar to what our Good Shepherd teaches.

Really isn't this the goal for all of us in our homes and church - to simply let the Good Shepherd speak to His sheep. On this Mother's Day, we have a reminder of the most important thing a mother can do. She wants her lambs to hear and know the voice of the Good Shepherd. So she teaches them God's Word, prays with them, and brings them to church so from little on they begin to recognize Jesus' voice. No matter what our role at church isn't this also our goal - to have the Good Shepherd speak? We are to just open the gate for the Good Shepherd, from the pulpit, in our classrooms, in everything we

do we want everyone to hear His voice. We want Jesus to speak to His sheep that we may follow Him.

Jesus uses another illustration which begins with an emphatic double “Amen” saying, **“I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who come before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them.”** How can Jesus be the shepherd and the gate? Try to visualize a sheep-pen. Where would be the best place for a shepherd to sleep? Wouldn't it be at the door - the opening where dangerous animals might come in, or the hole through which a sheep might wander off? Jesus says it again: **“I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.”** Again think of the shepherd lying at the gate - only through Him will the sheep be led in and out to find green pasture and then be brought back into safety.

In the same way, Jesus is the only entrance to life, to forgiveness, to God, to heaven. Jesus is the only gate that leads to salvation, the only name by which we must be saved. For Jesus is the good shepherd who provides His sheep with wool as white as snow by His perfect life. He is the good shepherd who **“lays down his life for the sheep.”** Jesus goes to the slaughter for the sheep so His sheep may go free. On the cross He accomplishes our salvation. The Good Shepherd takes up His life again by rising from the dead. He is still alive and always will be to speak to His Sheep. May we always listen to the voice of our Good Shepherd! Anyone who tries to teach us that salvation is found anywhere else other than through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is a thief and robber. Jesus says: **“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”**

If we asked people what they considered to be a full life, my guess is that we would get a variety of opinions. Some might believe a full life is making a lot of money and accumulating the most possessions. Others may say a full life is having a big family and making it to a grand old age to enjoy them. Others may think in terms of lasting legacy or years of enjoyment. Thank God we know what it is to have life to the full. It is to have the life that Jesus came to give us. The life our Good Shepherd speaks to us about in His Word. A full life is one where our Good Shepherd speaks and we listen; He leads and we follow; He calls us by name and we recognize His voice. Then even though we walk **“through the shadow of death”** we will fear no evil for Jesus, our Good Shepherd, is always with us. David knew a thing or two about shepherds. He also knew what it meant to have life and have it to the full as he describes this life in Psalm 23: **“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”** Amen.