

## Safe & Secure

May 3, 2020

John 10:1-10

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**My how we love our animals - our pets! I know that personally as I have been in many of your homes. Growing up I was a German shepherd guy. We raised German shepherds. I “know” dogs – big dogs in general and shepherds in particular. I can “read” them. I know when they’re happy and want to play. And I know when they’re mad and ready to bite. And most points between.**

**However, I don’t know cats. Donna—my wife—does. She had cats for pets as a child and can read them like a book. When first married we owned a big rescue cat, a Tabby we named Schoolie. Don’t ask me how we came up with that name! We both loved Schoolie! While Schoolie tolerated me...she loved Donna. She was Donna’s cat. When I’d come home and walk in the front door, and call for her, Schoolie would slowly emerge from the bedroom or office, stretch her back and yawn, then amble down the hall way toward me. When Donna came home and called her name, that cat would shoot out of whatever room she was in, streak down the hallway and rub against Donna’s legs, purring until she was picked up and loved.**

**Today is Good Shepherd Sunday. If we had read the Psalm from today’s lectionary it would have been the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. Our Gospel lesson for today reminds us of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, and the special relationship he has with his sheep, including the fact that he calls them by name! Let’s take a closer look at that special relationship.**

**For starters, vss. 1-2 remind us that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, comes to us first. He initiates the relationship. “Truly I tell you, whoever does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. But, the one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep.” Note the comparisons. The Good Shepherd versus Thieves and Bandits. Note the two modes of entry: Through the gate (or door) or climbing in by another way.**

**As a good Methodist, to me, this is a picture of God’s grace...God’s love to us through Jesus. You see, Jesus initiates a relationship with us. Jesus keeps coming to us, whether we’re aware of it or not, whether we want it or not.**

Unlike Thieves and Bandits who climb over the wall or enter some other way, Jesus comes directly to us through the gate in order to help us.

I recall the story of the lady who woke up in the middle of the night, startled, certain she had heard cries for help. Thinking it was her husband, she shook him but he kept right on sleeping. As the cries for help persisted she climbed out of bed, flipped the lights on in the hallway, and warily made her way to the living room where the cries were the loudest. “Where are you?” she yelled. “In the fireplace!” came the reply. And there...dangling face down in the chimney was a thief, stuck upside down. Protective police and firefighters soon arrived and eventually freed the thief after destroying the mantle and some of the brick work. The point? Jesus, the Good Shepherd, comes to us directly, and keeps coming to us, to be in relationship with us, to love us and help us.

Second, not only does Jesus come to his sheep, he calls them...he calls us, by name according to verses 3-5! In the midst of life’s greatest joys. In the depths of life’s darkest, most difficult times—like the Covid 19 pandemic we are all experiencing—in times of panic and fear, of deep pain and searing loss, Jesus comes and calls us by name!

I’m reminded of Mary Magdalene in John 20, arriving at the empty tomb in the garden - alone, in the dark, in deep sorrow. She misreads the situation and in panic and fear assumes that thieves have stolen Jesus’s body. Through her tears she mistakes our Risen Lord for the gardener until...when? Until he speaks her name! Then she recognizes him! And comes to him in unbridled joy! She believes and follows his instructions and runs off to tell the Good News to the other disciples. (Mary Magdalene was the first missionary, the first evangelist in John’s story of Jesus!) When the Good Shepherd comes to us in the midst of life’s joys and sorrows, may we like Mary recognize him...go to him, and follow him! That’s the proper response of sheep. To recognize and follow their shepherd.

So Jesus comes. Jesus calls. Then what? Then Jesus cares – He cares for his sheep. In fact, he leads them to abundant life, meaningful life, purpose filled life, a life of love for God and neighbor. Rev. Karoline Lewis points out that “we can’t forget that these words of Jesus, ‘I came that they might have life and have it abundantly’ in v. 10 are Jesus’s interpretation of (what happened in the

preceding chapter, chapter 9). (1) There Jesus heals a man blind from birth. A man begging for his next meal, a man constantly exposed to the elements, a man without community, alone to fend for himself. By restoring his sight, Jesus does much more than make him able to see again. In the healing of the man born blind, protection, provision, and presence are now his—forever!” That’s how Jesus cares for his sheep! Through his protection, provision and presence.

Remember, this man had likely been thrown out of his family no doubt years before and was barred from worship in the synagogue. As a blind man he was deemed a sinner...unclean...unfit to worship with the community. After receiving his sight from Jesus, he attempts to enter the synagogue (church) only to be thrown out again, rejected by his community. And what happens next? Jesus searches for him. Jesus finds him and comes to him and cares for him.

I really like the way Rev. Lewis puts it: “Jesus finds him and protects him. (John 9:35) The man born blind is now one of Jesus’ own, which means for him the promise of (not only protection), but the promise of provision, the promise of presence. The blind man is now a sheep of Jesus’s fold, part of Jesus’s community, with Jesus always. And when you know and experience his protection, provision, and presence...how can your life not be abundant?” (1)

This past week I read a story about a church in San Francisco that regularly served meals to needy people. (2) A sign hung over the doorway of the church’s dining room that read *Caritate Dei*. (Latin) A young man recently released from prison came in through that door and sat down to eat. A parishioner was cleaning the table next to him. “When do we get down on our knees and do the chores, lady?” he smirked. “You don’t,” she replied. “Then when’s the sermon comin’?” he asked. “Aren’t any,” she answered. “How ‘bout the lecture on life then?” “Aren’t any,” she replied. Suspiciously the man asked, “Then what’s the gimmick around here?” The parishioner pointed to the sign over the door. He looked at it and asked, “What’s it mean, lady?” “Out of love for God,” she said with a smile.

Jesus is not only the Good Shepherd, he’s also the gate, the door. The Door through which we walk and find abundant life. And it’s that Door to whom we point others—“Out of love for God.” Amen.

(1) Karoline Lewis, “Abundance,” *Working Preacher*, April 13, 2017.

(2) Peter W. Marty, “The Door to Abundant Life,” *Christian Century*, April 17, 1996.