

**Someone to Watch You**

COMMUNION

May 3, 2020

Scripture: John 10: 1-10

*<sup>1</sup> Jesus said: I tell you for certain that only thieves and robbers climb over the fence instead of going in through the gate to the sheep pen. <sup>2-3</sup> But the gatekeeper opens the gate for the shepherd, and he goes in through it. The sheep know their shepherd's voice. He calls each of them by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup> When he has led out all of his sheep, he walks in front of them, and they follow, because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup> The sheep will not follow strangers. They don't recognize a stranger's voice, and they run away.*

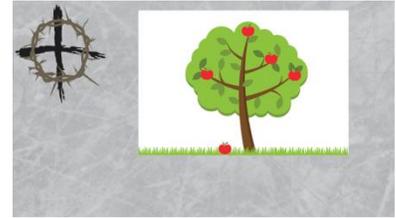
*<sup>6</sup> Jesus told the people this story. But they did not understand what he was talking about. <sup>7</sup> Jesus said: I tell you for certain that I am the gate for the sheep. <sup>8</sup> Everyone who came before me was a thief or a robber, and the sheep did not listen to any of them. <sup>9</sup> I am the gate. All who come in through me will be saved. Through me they will come and go and find pasture. <sup>10</sup> A thief comes only to rob, kill, and destroy. I came so that everyone would have life and have it in its fullest.*



Last week we walked with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus as Jesus unpacked the prophecies and other Old Testament scriptures that pointed to the Messiah –

to Jesus himself. This week we turn to another familiar story and a common Biblical metaphor as we explore the concept of Jesus being our good shepherd. As it is a well-used metaphor in both the Old and New Testament, we are familiar with the shepherd-sheep metaphor as it relates to our walk of faith and to our relationship with the Lord. As we begin today, let us pray...

This morning I want to begin with another metaphor as a means of helping us understand all that Jesus is saying in John 10. Perhaps you have heard a saying that goes with this image? No, that is not quite it. Let me see. Yes, here it is: "The tree does not stand far from the apple". Yes, yes – that is it. Perhaps you have heard another version. This version, though, gives us a different perspective on the more familiar version of this metaphor. In today's version it is



the tree that has place, that has agency. The big picture is about the tree and not the apple that may or may not have fallen from the tree. Even though an apple may fall, many other apples remain in the tree, at least for a time. There is a parallel here to our faith journeys. Although many try and fall away and seek to get free of the tree, the tree remains, and we always remain in the shadow of the tree. No matter how hard a person tries to distance themselves from God, God remains. And God woos. God always seeks to connect back to the lost and the broken. From the perspective of the tree in this metaphor, we also try and keep safe and close to us all who are ours. So too does God. So too does God.

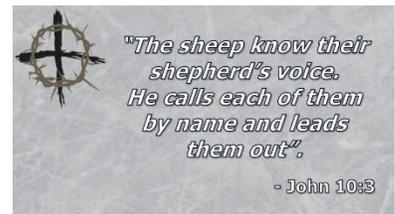


When we do remain in the shadow of the most high, we find peace and contentment, we find hope and joy, we find comfort and belonging, we find what Jesus is talking about today. We find life to the fullest. That is the main point of today's scripture passage. Please turn with me to John 10 as we explore God's love and care for you and for me. This morning we will be looking at verses one through ten. This is the vision of the kingdom of God cast by David. It is best represented in Psalm 23 – that familiar passage that we read in unison earlier in the service.

The shepherd provides safety and protection, love and care. The shepherd provides comfort and provides for the needs of the flock. The shepherd watches over the vulnerable and even over the ones that seek to get out from under the gentle staff of the shepherd – the ones that seek to fall away from the tree.

In today's passage from John 10, Jesus also makes the claim that he is the gate through which all of the sheep must enter. There is no other way into the fold, into the family of God. In John 14:6, Jesus put it this way: *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* As our passage today opens, Jesus reminds us that many others try and get into the sheep pen. In verse one we heard that only *"thieves and robbers climb over the fence"*. In our lives, there are many voices that try to tell us that there is a shortcut to joy and contentment, to meaning and purpose in life. Even in the "Christian" world we hear those voices. *Just give enough money and God will bless you. Just do enough good and you can make it into heaven.* But, in the end, if we follow the other voices, we will find that the gate is closed. The gatekeeper will not open the gate for those who follow someone or something other than Jesus.

In verse three we read, *"The sheep know their shepherd's voice. He calls each of them by name and leads them out"*. Before we move on in the passage, we need to sit with this verse for a second because it raises some questions. The first question is this: How do we know the shepherd's voice?



Put another way: How do we discern Jesus' voice from all of the other voices that we hear in our lives? And this leads to second, perhaps a more pertinent question: Who is your shepherd? I invite you to turn these two questions personal, to consider them for a few minutes sometime in the week ahead. Think on them, wrestle with your answers. They are the first question in the GPS section – the "grow" part.

Turning to verse four we get a beautiful picture of discipleship. As I read Jesus' words, close your eyes and take in this image. *"When he has led out all of his sheep, he walks in front of them, and they follow, because they know his voice"*. In our lives, Jesus first calls us out of the darkness of the world, out of our sin, out of our lostness and brokenness – then he steps out in front and beckons us to follow him. When we are honed in, when we are focused on Jesus' voice, then we know we are safe, we are care for, we are loved. For the sheep in this picture, the way ahead is not clear. They cannot see around the next bend. Yet they follow because they know the shepherd loves and cares for them. There is no fear, no doubt, no worry, no stress, no anxiety. When we know and follow Jesus closely and completely, we are like these sheep. For me, this again evokes the words of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm that we read together earlier, particularly the last verse, which reads, *"Your kindness and love will always be with me each day of my life, and I will live forever in your house, LORD"*. So true when we follow the shepherd.





But we don't always follow, do we? In verse five Jesus tells us that the sheep will not follow strangers and that they will even run away from the voice of a stranger.

Oh, if we were only so obedient, so faithful. We all know from our own personal experiences that we can too easily fall into listening to other voices. Sometimes the voice is our own, sometimes it is the voice of the world, and, yes, sometimes it is the voice of Satan that tempts and draws us in. At times in our lives we have all looked up, like this sheep, and wondered how we got so far from the path, so far from the flock, so far from the tree, so far from the good shepherd.

In our individualistic culture we are taught to express ourselves, to try and attain our own uniqueness, to find success in whatever way that brings us happiness, using whatever means necessary. As Americans or for almost anyone living in a modern, western culture, the ideas of being led and of following the voice of someone else run against almost all we are taught in school and in athletics and at work and through our culture. We chafe at the idea of having someone to watch over us. To have to depend on someone else almost feels wrong. Connecting back to the opening illustration, too often we want to be the tree when we are really the apple. To make the decision to follow Jesus and to listen to his voice is really counter-cultural. To choose the path of following Jesus means trusting in him above all else and it involves taking risk. Both are essential when stepping away from all those other voices we hear.



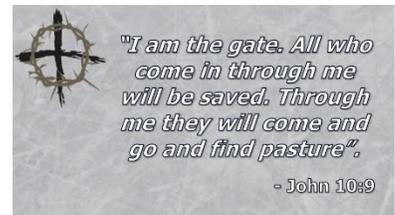
Both trust and risk are necessary for being in relationship with anyone – including God. My friends, we are called to trust in Jesus and to risk walking with him as he steps out and leads and guides. That is what Jesus is talking about in verse four, when he says, *"he walks in front of them, and they follow, because they know his voice"*. Jesus spent three years revealing what God's love looks like when lived out in the world. He spent three years showing what a life lived in obedience to God looked like. He walked out in front of us and continues to do so every time we open our Bibles, every time the Spirit whispers or nudges us, every time we connect to him through prayer and study. These are some of the means that we can use to know his voice.

In the second half of our passage, Jesus changes metaphors and states that he is also the gate. He is speaking partly of the gate to the sheep pen that he referred to earlier in our passage. But even more so, Jesus is speaking of the gate to life – both here and in eternity. Hear both the present and the future in these words that Jesus speaks in verse nine: *"I am the gate. All who come in through me will be saved.*

*Through me they will come and go and find pasture"*.

When we enter into a relationship through Jesus, we are

made right with God. If we choose to trust in Jesus, to walk with him through this life, to risk for the gospel, we will be saved into the next life. And doing so, in this life we will find those places of green pastures, those places of nourishment; we will find those places of still waters, those places of rest.

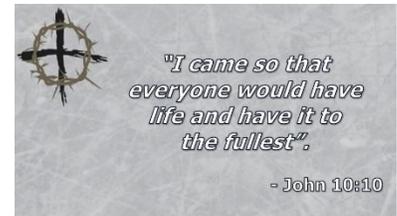




Walking with Jesus and having someone to watch over us, brings us hope and joy, contentment and peace.

Though the waters may rise, we do not fear being overwhelmed. Though the world may press in, we do not feel crushed. Though the darkness may appear and the night draw near, we stand in faith. The good shepherd always remains present, walking with us, holding our hand.

As our passage closes, Jesus summarizes all of this in one sentence, saying, *"I came so that everyone would have life and have it to the fullest"*. He came not just so



that we would have a life or even a reasonably good life. Jesus came so that we would have the best life possible – life to the fullest. That is what we find when we choose to trust fully in Jesus, allowing him to watch over us, to guide us, to protect us. Life to the fullest. Thanks be to God. Amen.

### **GPS – Grow, Pray, Study**

- 1) Grow. How do you know the good shepherd's voice? Who is your good shepherd? How do others see this in your life?
- 2) Pray. Where is Satan working at you and your faith? Pray for the Holy Spirit to be a shield about you and to intercede for you before the throne.
- 3) Study. Where else in the Bible does Jesus use these terms *"thieves"* and *"robbers"*? Do a word study on these terms and discover how that adds depth to this passage.