

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Fourth Sunday After Easter, May 2, 2021

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)
Hymns: 32 (199:4) 364, 368, 476:4
Lessons: Isaiah 49:13-18; Acts 5:26-42; John 21:20-25
Sermon Text: John 10:1-11
Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Dear Friends in Christ,

One of the most wonderful miracles that Jesus performed was when he healed a man born blind. The Pharisees hated Jesus and did not acknowledge that Jesus had performed this miracle. They wanted the people to acknowledge them as their spiritual leaders and follow them. The man who was healed testified of Jesus by telling the Pharisees how his sight was restored. ***“Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing,”*** John 9:32-33. For making this confession the Pharisees told the man who was healed, ***“You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!”*** John 9:34.

This denial of the truth that Jesus must have come from God is another example of how the Pharisees set themselves up as spiritual instructors for the people, whereas in reality they were the ones who needed to be instructed. There are many spiritual leaders like that today who are misleading their hearers. With this in mind, let us consider:

THE PARABLE OF THE TRUE SHEPHERD AND HIS SHEEP

- 1. Jesus is the only true Shepherd whom we are to follow.**
- 2. By faith in Jesus we enter into the Holy Christian Church.**
- 3. Jesus is the only one who can provide for his followers and give them eternal life.**

Jesus said, ***“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 parable tells us about a pen for the sheep, a roofless enclosure in which the sheep remain overnight for their protection. The pen has a wall around it and it has a door that is the proper place for entrance into the pen. This door or gate is guarded by a porter or gatekeeper. If anyone tries to enter the pen secretly by climbing over the wall and not going through the gate, he has an evil motive in mind. He is a false shepherd who intends harm to the sheep or who wants to steal sheep that do not belong to him.

In contrast, Jesus speaks of one who is the true shepherd of the sheep. ***“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.”*** These words tell of the true shepherd and explain the tender relationship between a true shepherd and his sheep. The true shepherd is known by the watchman and permits the shepherd to enter. Though there may be more than one flock of sheep in the pen, the sheep immediately recognize the voice of their own shepherd.

“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.” A true shepherd never has to force his sheep to follow him. They know the familiar voice of their own shepherd. A stranger who is not their shepherd may call loudly and with much persuasiveness, but the sheep will not listen. They will run away from him. The stranger may wear the same clothes as the shepherd, but because his voice is strange the sheep will not listen.

After Jesus told the parable, our text says, ***“Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them.”*** The Pharisees did not understand Jesus’ words because they were filled with hatred against Jesus and did not want to learn what he was teaching.

The great truth that Jesus teaches us is that he is the only true Shepherd whom we are to follow. The man who was born blind and was healed by Jesus was right in clinging to Jesus in true faith. Jesus Christ is the one whom God the Father sent to be our spiritual Shepherd. This is a teaching of God’s Word. It teaches us whom we are to trust and follow and whom we are not to follow. The blind man who was healed said to Jesus, ***“Lord, I believe.”*** On another occasion when some of Jesus’ followers left him, and Jesus asked the twelve, ***“You do not want to leave too, do you?”*** Peter correctly answered, ***“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God,”*** John 6:67-68. This should also by the grace of God be our confession of faith.

This leads us to consider that it is **by faith that we enter the Holy Christian Church.**

2.

“Therefore Jesus said again, ‘I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep.’” Jesus once again directs our attention to the sheep pen and himself as the gate for the sheep to enter in. Jesus is here speaking in figurative language of the Holy Christian Church. In the Apostolic Creed we also refer to the Holy Christian Church as the Communion of Saints, that is, all people who believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. When Jesus says that he is the gate for the sheep, he is saying that it is only by faith in him that anyone can enter the Holy Christian Church. He is teaching the same truth that he spoke in these words, ***“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me,”*** John 14:6. This is also the truth that Peter preached to the leaders of the Jews, ***“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved,”*** Acts 4:12. All other ways by which people have tried to be saved are to be cast aside as useless. No one can be saved by the preaching of the Social Gospel that tells of social or economic endeavors. No one can be saved by private or public works of charity, by trying to keep any man-made commandments, or any other so-called good works.

Jesus says, ***“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.”*** There have always been people who were false shepherds and did not teach people the truth of God. At Jesus’ time these were the Pharisees and teachers of the law (also called Scribes). They made the claim that they had the true knowledge that leads to God and salvation. But actually they were keeping the people in spiritual ignorance. In the Gospel of Luke we are told how Jesus denounced these false leaders, ***“Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering,”*** Luke 11:52. The Gospel of Matthew also tells what Jesus said to his enemies, ***“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to,”*** Matthew 23:13.

But Jesus says, ***“the sheep did not listen to them.”*** By the grace of God the true followers of Jesus did not bow to the authority of the self-righteous Pharisees and teachers of the law. This is an example for Jesus’ followers of all ages, today also. True followers of Christ know the voice of their Good Shepherd. That voice we hear from the Word of God, the Bible. We recognize the Bible as the truth our Shepherd wants us to believe. When we hear another voice that does not agree with the Word of God, we should not listen. This is in accord with what the Bible teaches about what we should do when false teachers speak. ***“I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naïve people,”*** Romans 16:17-18.

Finally, Jesus teaches us that **he is the only one who can provide for his followers and give them eternal life.**

3.

Jesus says, ***“I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.”*** If anyone by the grace of God trusts in Jesus as his only Savior, that person by faith is a child of God and a member of the Holy Christian Church. Such a person enjoys all the blessings of salvation in Christ. He has full forgiveness of sins and peace of heart and mind. This we express when we speak the words of Psalm 23: ***“The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me,”*** v. 1-4. The ***“rod and staff”*** are the means of grace, the Gospel in word and sacrament. Through these we are assured of divine pardon and peace. Our faith is strengthened and we are enabled to serve our Good Shepherd in true faith even more fervently. This is why we should by God’s grace continue to trust in Jesus as our Savior.

Jesus says, ***“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.”*** False teachers may not intend to destroy the faith of the people who hear them. Nevertheless, all error, all false teaching, is like poison to the soul. It always leads people away from Christ who is the only way to salvation. Jesus in our text gives us good reason to beware of all false teachers. If this warning is to be effective for us, we must know and recognize only the voice of our Good Shepherd. That means we must be well acquainted with the teaching of God’s Word and make every effort to study it for the strengthening of our faith. This includes daily Bible reading. Reviewing what we have learned in our Catechism will also be most helpful. Then when false teachers come with their soul-destroying teachings, we will immediately recognize those teachings as contrary to the voice of our Good Shepherd.

Jesus as our Good Shepherd says, ***“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”*** Jesus has done for us the most that any good shepherd could do for his sheep. He has sacrificed himself for us. He had so much love for us that gave his own life for us on the cross to pay for all our sins. Jesus says, ***“Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends,”*** John 15:13. Paul writes, ***“Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!”*** Romans 5:7-10.

When we hear in the Gospel all that our Good Shepherd has done for us and still does for us, we certainly as his believing sheep should put all our trust in him, gratefully serve him in our daily life, and by God’s grace through all our lives let his Holy Word be our guide. For all that Jesus did for us, we pray,

“Jesus, my Shepherd,
Guardian, Friend,
My Prophet, Priest, and King,
My Lord, my Life,
my Way, my End,
Accept the praise I bring.” Amen
(The Lutheran Hymnal 364:5)

(Revised from a Ministry By Mail sermon for April 20, 2008.)