Easter 4A 2020 One Door for Sheep and Shepherds

John 10: 1 - 10

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. 2 But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. 5 A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” 6 This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

7 So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. 9 I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

The word from the Lord this morning is exactly what we need. While this is true for any given Sunday as Peter said to Jesus: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” John 6:68) It is true also now as we are facing global uncertainty from the covid 19 pandemic.

We do not know who is carrying the virus since they may be asymptomatic. We do not know how long self-isolation will last although some businesses may be allowed to open on Monday. We do not know if our country will climb out of this economic depression. We do not know of only one source to glean news and information since so many contradict each other.

Jesus brings comfort for us because He is the Good Shepherd. When the Lord is my shepherd then I do not lack anything or shall be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. How could there be any concern of having enough food? He leads me beside still waters. How could there be a buying panic for bottled water when Jesus promised to provide food and water?

Even when I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me. The devil, the world and my own sinful flesh may and will attack me, but when we pray “Lead us not into temptation” it is not the Lord who attacks us but we are confident that God will guard and keep us while we pass through some dark places.

How can you know you will overcome them? If so many do not believe in Christ as the only way it looks like the devil has blinded them. How do you know he hasn’t blinded you? If the whole world is in a pandemic panic and pins its hope on how well each global citizen self-isolates, then it stands on shaky ground with no clue on how to build on the rock of Christ, who is the only solid foundation. My soul may be worried that I am not good enough to live forever because of the solid evidence of my sins and my lack of love for God and my neighbour.

These fears are not unique to you. King David felt them too. But still he was confident that God restored his soul. How? The Good Shepherd led him in the paths of righteousness. If you understand that to mean that God will lead you how to do good, then your soul can never find rest. There can be no certainty when it depends on how much good you do.

When you only look to your kind deeds and progress in the faith as assurance that you believe, like James says that good works prove a living faith, your soul will always be restless, with no peace or certainty of where you stand before God. Even atheists strive to be good neighbours.

God restores your soul by leading you in the paths of righteousness **for his name’s sake**. Psalm 25:11 says “For your name’s sake, O Lord, pardon my guilt, for it is great.” In another psalm (31:3) it says “for you are my rock and my fortress; and for your name’s sake you lead me and guide me.”

God keeps His promises. He will never lie. Jesus came in truth to save us all because He came in the name of His Father. Jesus came and defeated the devil by silencing him so that your sin will never be brought up to the Father. Jesus came and overcame the world by accepting its verdict of crucifixion as His Father’s cup of wrath for the sin of the world. Jesus came and gave you a new heart to trust in him for forgiveness and eternal life.

Only in Jesus is there certainty of salvation, comfort for anxious hearts and restless souls. If anyone teaches otherwise, Jesus calls them thieves and robbers. False teachers lead people to trust in themselves and their good works. They climb up over the wall to get into the sheep pen to harm God’s flock. They seek monetary gain by fleecing the flock. They satisfy their appetite by killing the sheep for meat. They only love themselves and foolishly make God reward them for good deeds thus turning Him into a grateful debtor by their false piety.

Jesus is the only door to the sheep and for the sheep. The gatekeeper of the sheep only opens for Jesus. Anyone else is not authorized or qualified or sent by the Father. Only Jesus is both man and God and the only one to make atonement for us all.

So the sheep are glad to enter through the door at night, when death’s shadows fall heavy, for Jesus will protect them and guard and keep them. He is praying for his church even now especially for his beloved as they near death.

The sheep are also glad to go out through the door in the morning, for Jesus leads them to green pastures and still waters to satisfy their bodily needs but also to teach them the joy of their salvation in the spiritual eating of his word.

So it does not sound strange on this Good Shepherd Sunday to hear Jesus say that He is the door. He is the one and only door to and for his blood bought sheep.

But now comes the important question of where how does He speak? How do the sheep hear his voice? When does he call them by name and how does he lead them out? To know this is to have a peaceful soul and a joyful heart. To be convinced of it is the one thing needful for a godly life and death.

The voice of Jesus is heard in His living gospel. Every time the good news of Christ crucified for the life of the world is heard, He is speaking. Every time it is heard that Jesus is the only Way, the only Truth and the only Life, His voice is heard.

But where does He know my name and call me by it? Look no farther than when Christ baptized you and spoke your name. In this way God said to you when he baptized you: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.”

The challenge may arise that it wasn’t Jesus doing that but a pastor. One may claim that it was a pastor that preached the gospel and baptized you not Jesus. Stop and think who sends pastors. Who commands them to preach the gospel and to baptize? Whose ministry are pastors carrying out, their own or the Lord’s?

The word pastor means shepherd in Latin. When earthly under-shepherds teach Jesus is Life and has come to give us life more abundantly and then baptize according to his word, then they are serving the One Good Shepherd. If not, if they are seeking to make a name for themselves or to build an empire here on earth, they are thieves and robbers and must give an account to God.

So Jesus is the door to and for the sheep. He is also the door for his under-shepherds we call pastors who teach and baptize in His name. There is no other door. And so there is no other way.

Truly, truly I say to you, that your sin is pardoned by Christ and your death is swallowed up by His resurrection. Christ has not abandoned His flock in these days of self-isolation. Pray for faithful pastors and pray for the flock while it is scattered. Remember your baptism and rely on God’s promises of comfort and rest even through the valley of great shadows.

Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed! Hallelujah