

Sermon John 10 1 10 4th S of Easter 2011

Sermon: 4th Sunday of Easter

Text: John 10:1-10: Jesus, the Good Shepherd

Theme: The thieves and the Good Shepherd

Goal: To alert against the thieves and to lead the flock to listen to and to follow the Good Shepherd Jesus.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: Jesus teaches through a contrast in this text: The thieves and the shepherd. Opposing one to the other, with their own characteristics and ways to handle the sheep, Jesus will open our eyes and warn us against the thieves, giving us the right line to follow and to get life.

Our experience in Kenya was, in some sense, a return to the past. To see the Maasai shepherds with their big flocks of sheep and goats walking around the savannah, and bringing them to the suburbs of the city in the time of drought, was a portrait of the biblical pictures of the shepherd and the sheep. Once we saw a little girl standing in the middle of a big flock, carrying a baby sheep in her arms. It was so cute... - On the other hand, sometimes we heard that sheep and cows were stolen during the night by other tribes...and this caused a big confusion, fight and murder among those people.

I – The thief

Jesus began this parable talking about the thief: “The man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by another way, is a thief and a robber.” Some verses after Jesus says: “I’m the gate.” This means that everyone who comes without Christ is not a shepherd, but a thief. Martin Luther wrote: *“All who do not preach Christ are thieves and robbers”* (Series A, 119).

Several preachers and churches are deceiving people by preaching their own ideas, and not the word of Jesus. We are studying in the Bible Study Group the “Statement on Homosexuality” that our Synod has prepared. And you know that some churches have already approved the marriage between people of the same gender, and are ordaining active homosexuals as priests and bishops. Can we say that they are still shepherds of God's flock? NO! They are preaching and practicing what is against the word of God! They are not preaching Christ. What name can we give them, according to our Gospel? ... They are entering the sheep pen, the church, climbing over the walls, and not through the gate, Jesus. Their misunderstanding of God's love leads them and the people to darkness and to death, not to light and life in Jesus. - And it is similar with several other issues as well.

Jesus says that “the thief comes only to steal, to kill and to destroy”. The apostle Paul warns in Romans 16:18: “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.” And Jesus warns in Matthew 7:15 and 21: “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves...Not everyone who says to me, 'LORD, LORD', will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”

God's solution to homosexuality and to all other sins is not just to accept the situation, but to forgive the repentant sinner by faith in Jesus and to give strength to a new life according God's will. God did this with each of us, as He called us from the darkness to the new life in Christ, and as he takes us daily by our hand to lead us in the right way of His will.

If we want to help the homosexuals and other sinners as well, we shall not give them support on their wrong way of life, blessing their union and behavior; but we shall show them the will of God, call them to repentance, and show them the love of Christ, who accepts the

repentant sinner and gives new life in justice and freedom. - The function of the church in the world is not just to give laws and social directions, but she is here to preach Christ, and with Him a new life!

II – The Good Shepherd

In contrast with the thief is the Good Shepherd, Jesus Himself. He bought and redeemed His sheep by His precious blood (1 Pe 1:19), “so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness... For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (1 Pe 2:24,25). He takes care of His sheep with love.

Jesus knows His sheep by name. “He calls His own sheep by name and leads them out.” He knows that my name is Walter and that your names are Marja, Shawn, Quinton, Eckard and so on. This comforts me so much! I'm not just a number in the statistics, or someone in the crowd; I am a sheep of Jesus' flock and Jesus knows my name. As we sang: *“I am Jesus little lamb...loves me every day the same, even calls me by my name”* (LW 517.1). Through the prophet Isaiah (43:1) God says: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you. I have summoned you by name, you are mine!”

The text says more: “When the Good Shepherd has brought out all His own, He goes ahead of them, and His sheep follow Him because they know His voice.” Now, at the Service, we are inside the pen, inside the church, protected by the walls. But right after the service we go again out to the world. We know that our daily life is full of dangers and temptations. Jesus goes ahead of us and His voice is still in our ears, in our minds and in our hearts, and He guides us in His way. As so many other voices are shouting in the streets, in the radio and on TV, in the newspapers and books, preaching and announcing several options and new ways of life, we shall never miss the voice of Jesus among all the noises around us. We must not follow other voices which take us to dark and wrong ways. We follow Jesus,

because we know His voice and we trust that He will always lead us “in paths of righteousness and besides quiet waters”; in spite of “the valley of the shadow of death” that is so close to us and sometimes we need to cross it – as we confess in the Psalm 23.

“I am the gate of the sheep”, says Jesus. “Whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pastures. I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full!” Do we need any better assurance than this one? Why would we follow other voices who deceive us?

Conclusion: In the prayer for today we asked: *“Almighty God, merciful Father, since You have wakened from death the Shepherd of Your sheep, grant us Your Holy Spirit that we may know the voice of our Shepherd and follow Him, that sin and death may never pluck us out of your hand...”* The Holy Spirit opens our eyes and our hearts to faith in Jesus, and He opens our ears as well to listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd. This must be our constant prayer.

The sheep are very passive animals and always in dangers. Without the Good Shepherd we would not be able to survive. But with Him we have life, life in abundance, and eternal life. Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle
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