

# FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER (CONFIRMATION 2017)

## Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church

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### Living Life to the Full

John 10:1-10

*“Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. <sup>2</sup> The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup> The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup> When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup> But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” <sup>6</sup> Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them. <sup>7</sup> Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. <sup>8</sup> All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. <sup>9</sup> I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. <sup>10</sup> The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*

Today is an amazing day. Sitting in the front of our church, we have seventeen eighth-grade students waiting to confirm their faith in Lord publicly. One amazing aspect of the day is that we were able to assemble seventeen students in the same place at the same time. This is not an easy feat. Any time you try to get more than a few students together these days, it seems you are always bumping into busy schedules. There are sporting events, band concerts, club meetings, and a wide variety of activities you’ve probably never heard of. Kids these days certainly have full schedules. And we could probably debate whether this is a good thing or a bad thing. One thing that does not need to be debated is the fact that there is something much better than simply having a full schedule and that is living a life to the full. This is the kind of life Jesus our Good Shepherd has come to provide and is the kind of life our confirmands and each of us can enjoy if we simply listen to the voice of our Good Shepherd.

Today we hear that voice of Jesus as he speaks a couple of parables, using the picture of sheep in a sheep pen. Jesus begins by saying: *“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 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. 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.”* Jesus makes a contrast in this parable between a shepherd entering a sheep pen and thieves entering a sheep pen. It is very easy to tell the two apart—the shepherd enters by the gate and the sheep recognize his voice. The thief climbs in some other way and the sheep do not recognize his voice.

The meaning of this parable is apparent. Jesus is the shepherd who enters the sheep pen the right way. When he speaks, his people—all believers—recognize his voice. The thieves who try to lead the sheep astray represent false teachers who try to mislead God’s sheep the believers. As easy as it might seem to understand the parable, it’s not always easy to follow what the parable implies—that is: only listen to the shepherd’s voice and not the thieves’. The Jews, who made up Jesus’ original audience, had difficulty applying these words. There were many thieves that had come into their midst. There were false teachers like the Pharisees who taught that eternal life could be earned by following man-made rules. There were false prophets who downplayed God’s law and said that everything was fine with the people even when it wasn’t. Unfortunately, many of God’s people did not act like the sheep in the parable. They did not run away from the false teachers, but rather they followed after them.

We face a similar danger in our lives. Just think of all the voices that are out there to which we can listen. We live in an age of communication. This is a great blessing. But it also presents a dilemma. We are able to receive messages in so many different ways, which ones will we choose to listen to and which ones will we ignore? There are just as many spiritual thieves and robbers out there today as there were when Jesus first spoke this parable. You can hear them on the radio or television. You can read their articles in the newspaper or on the internet. Some of the things they say may be very appealing. They may promise you health and wealth on this earth—your best life now. They

may tell you that all these divisions and denominations out there are just tearing us apart—we need to be more accepting of other faiths, since they are all different paths leading to the same goal. If I went on to list all of the different false teachings out there, we would be here for weeks, if not longer. And those aren't the only voices vying for your attention. Some voices don't even try to mask themselves as preachers of God's Word. They will admit that what they are saying goes against God's Word, but they don't care. They try to appeal to your sinful flesh. "C'mon, give it a try. It's not going to hurt you just this one time." Think of all the voices that are you and I hear on a daily basis encouraging us to take part in all kinds of sinful actions.

How do we know which of these voices is the voice of the shepherd and which of them are the voices of thieves and robbers? We have a very easy way of finding out. Jesus' voice is the voice that speaks in the Bible. His is the voice of the Holy Scriptures. If someone is promising you something that is not found on the pages of God's Word, he or she is a thief. If someone twists the Scripture to say something different than what you know to be true from your own instruction in the Word, that is the voice of a robber. If someone tells you to do something that blatantly contradicts what Jesus says in his Word, that is not the voice of the Shepherd. Distinguishing between the voice of the Shepherd and the voice of thief is sometimes a difficult task. It is a task that becomes easier the better you know the voice of the Shepherd—the better you know God's Word.

The second parable that Jesus speaks cuts right to the heart of the matter. He tells the people the end result of listening to the thieves and contrasts it with the result of following the shepherd. Jesus says, *"I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. 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. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."* In this parable, Jesus compares himself to the gate to the pen, rather than to the shepherd himself. But, again, there is a contrast between Jesus and the thieves and robbers. Jesus says that those who enter through him find life. Those who follow the thief will be killed and destroyed.

Sadly, there were many who rejected this truth. Instead of following Jesus, they followed the false teachers, such as the Pharisees. And although it seemed like a better way to them at the time, the end result was the destruction of their souls. Jesus had something much better to offer them. He was the way to eternal life. In the following verses, Jesus told the people just how he brought that eternal life by saying that he would lay down his life for the sheep as their Good Shepherd. The result of Jesus' sacrifice would be forgiveness and eternal life for those who believe in him. That is what Jesus called having life "to the full."

As we consider what voices we are going to listen to from day to day, it is good for us to think also of the end result of listening to those voices. False teachers may preach things that sound very nice and appealing to us. But the end result of mixing error with the truth of God's Word can be damaging to our souls. If we let that error completely drown out the truth, it can mean our eternal destruction. The same is true of following the voices of temptations that we hear. It might gratify our sinful flesh to participate in this or that sinful activity, but in the end, it always ends up hurting us in one way or another. Sin never carries through on its promise of joy and happiness. It only brings guilt and other problems into our life.

Jesus wants us to know that there is another way. Like the sheep in the parable, we can enter through the gate that leads to good pasture. We enter through this gate by listening to the voice of our Good Shepherd, Jesus. In contrast to the other voices out there, the voice of Jesus always tells us what we need to hear. It is a voice that speaks to us through the Word and Sacraments. It is a voice that calls us to repentance when we need a call to repentance. It is a voice that soothes us and calms us with the beautiful gospel truth of forgiveness and salvation through Jesus' blood. The more we listen to his voice, the more we experience the "full life" Jesus speaks of. I read earlier this week that Jesus gives us life without the big "if" in the middle. He gives us the peace of knowing our sins are forgiven, the joy of possessing eternal life and the hope of the glory that awaits us. This is a better life than anyone else could ever offer. And this life is ours as we place our trust in Jesus and listen to his voice. **Amen.**

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