

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: The One Who Calls My Name

Lesson: John 10:1-10

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

Friends, today is the Fourth Sunday of Easter. During the season of Easter, we share the traditional Easter greeting. Let us do so today as well:

Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!

(Slide 1) When we look at the stories in the Bible, there are many references to sheep. I have never personally raised sheep, so I do not know from experience whether this is truly the case, but generally speaking, sheep are said to like moving in flocks. We can see this in pictures of sheep, and when we drive past sheep farms, we often see them gathered together grazing. From this, it seems that sheep are not animals that live independently alone, but rather animals that live in groups. And as they live in groups, sheep are known to have poor sense of direction, distance, and depth perception, so they tend to blindly follow the sheep in front of them and around them.

Because of this, even if there is a cliff in front of them, they may not recognize the danger, and if left on their own, they can easily fall into serious danger. Also, because sheep have very little ability to defend themselves, they cannot protect themselves from predators such as lions or bears, nor can they run away quickly. When threatened, they tend to freeze in place or run away slowly.

As we reflect on sheep, we realize that they are not all that different from us at times. Just as sheep cannot sense the danger right in front of them, we also are not

very different—we often do not know what dangers may be approaching us. We do not know what will happen one month from now, one week from now, even tomorrow, or even later this afternoon.

Furthermore, it is incredibly difficult for us to discern which pieces of information among the vast flood we receive are true or false, and which ones are meant to deceive us. There are times when we make a choice, believing it to be right in the moment, only to find out later that it was not. In this way, if someone truly intends to deceive us, most of us would likely be deceived.

Unfortunately, we find ourselves in a truly weak state. This is why we often feel no different from sheep, who have almost no ability to protect themselves.

Moreover, we live in a flood of information, a flood of news. The moment we turn on our smartphones, countless messages and voices speak to us: “You must live this way,” “This is what a successful life looks like,” “If you do not do this now, if you do not buy this now, you will fall behind.” We live in an age where so many voices each claim to be right, and at times, in the midst of all these voices, we wander, lose our way, and even find ourselves in the wrong place without realizing it.

Friends, in this noisy and chaotic world filled with countless voices, whose voice are you listening to and following?

(Slide 2) When we look at images of sheep, there is always someone nearby protecting them. We call that person the shepherd. The shepherd leads the sheep on the right and safe paths, takes them to places with grass and water to feed them, and protects them from dangerous animals like wolves and bears. Because of this, sheep cannot live without a shepherd, and they constantly listen for the shepherd’s voice.

In Palestine at that time, multiple flocks of sheep would spend the night together in one sheepfold. Then, in the morning, when each shepherd came to take his sheep, he would stand at the gate and call them with a unique signal or by name. Amazingly, only the sheep that recognized their own shepherd’s voice would respond and come out.

(Slide 3) Verse 3 says: “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.”

God does not call us merely as a faceless “crowd.” God knows each and every one of you—your circumstances, your pain, and your name—and calls you tenderly. This is why we must listen not to the anxious voices of the world that shake our hearts, but to the voice of the Lord who knows us best and gives us peace. When we follow the voices of others, we lose our way and wander, but when we follow the voice of God, the owner of our lives who calls us, we find the “gate.”

There are times when we walk through a thick fog in life. We cannot see what lies ahead, and the voices around us say, “This is the right way,” “No, that is the right way,” only adding to our confusion. In those moments, the Shepherd does not hand us a complicated map. He simply calls our name. Just as sheep are reassured by the single sound of their shepherd’s voice, we too gain the courage to stand again by the simple truth that the Lord knows our name. That is the greatest privilege we have.

Jesus tells us that He is “the gate for the sheep.” For sheep, the gate has two meanings. First, it means protection. Second, it means freedom. The gate protects them at night from wolves and thieves, and in the morning, it becomes the passage through which they follow the shepherd out into green pastures.

To pass through the gate, who is Jesus, does not mean being trapped within a religious system. It means experiencing true peace in the Lord and, at the same time, boldly going out into the wide world that He has prepared. Friends, do not strive to create your own gate in life. Simply come to Jesus, who is already the open “gate for the sheep” before us.

(Slide 4) In John chapter 10, Jesus clearly tells us the reason He came into this world: “that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” The thief comes only to steal, kill, and destroy, but Jesus came to give life and abundant grace.

Sometimes we misunderstand and think, “If I live a life of faith, won’t I have to give up many things and end up with a restrictive life?” But the good shepherd did not come to shear the sheep just to consume them. He came so that the sheep might eat the best grass, drink clean water, and live a life full of vitality. A life following the Lord is never a life of lack. The Lord does not give us just enough grace to survive—He desires to give us overflowing, abundant grace.

Friends, sheep do not have good eyesight, so they cannot see far ahead. But they have very keen hearing. As long as they can hear the shepherd’s voice, they are not afraid.

Tomorrow, and throughout this coming week, when the many noises of the world begin to shake you, what if you pause for a moment? And what if you take time to focus on the gentle voice of the Lord calling your name? He does not lead us to a path of death. He leads us to a path that gives life and fills our lives abundantly.

Friends, an abundant life does not begin when our pockets are full, but when we realize that our hearts are in the hands of the Good Shepherd. Even if we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, if the Shepherd is with us, that place is no longer a place of fear, but a pathway leading to green pastures. This week, may you lower the noise of the world and increase the gentle, soul-stirring voice of the Lord, entering into a precious time of spiritual listening.

Trusting in Jesus, our Good Shepherd, and following His voice, I bless you in the name of the Lord that you and I may move forward into the feast of “abundant life.”