

Yes, this is Good Shepherd Sunday. However, today Jesus does not call himself the Good Shepherd, as he will later in this chapter. Some churches, including ours, repeat the lessons every three years. John 10 is divided into thirds, of which one is read each year on this Sunday. Being on cycle A we start again at the beginning of the chapter.

While Jesus does refer to a shepherd, here he identifies himself as the Door through which the shepherd leads the sheep in and out. Who are the gatekeeper, shepherds and thieves? How is Jesus the Door?

This chapter follows immediately the healing of the man born blind. Jesus had called the Pharisees blind, because they believed they knew God without accepting Jesus as God's presence among them.

Because they reject Christ as God's Son, they are false teachers who seek to steal the sheep and lead them, but not through the gate of the sheep fold. What they will do to the sheep will rob them of the Gospel, steal their peace and assurance, kill all hope, and ultimately destroy them. *Destroy* in Scripture means to perish eternally. It is in John 3:16 where all who believe in Jesus will not perish, but have eternal life.

This text calls for vigilance and a warning that the sheep are in need of faithful shepherds. Peter compared the devil to a roaring lion in search of anyone he could destroy. He does this through religious leaders and others who deceive and destroy believers with false promises and threats. History reveals their works.

Jesus contrasts the shepherd to the thief who climbs the wall at night because he is up to no good. The sheep are not his and he has no right to lead them. The shepherd, on the other hand, admitted by the gatekeeper, goes through the gate of the sheep pen. By morning, he leads them out for pasture and by evening, he leads them in for rest and safety. This is the work of pastors in the church. The New Testament uses the same word for both shepherd and pastor.

Why would you follow a pastor's lead? What makes a pastor a true shepherd? The sheep know the shepherd because he comes through the gate in the daylight, and they recognize his voice.

Likewise, church members would follow a pastor that comes through the door, not deceiving in the darkness, but speaking in the light the familiar words of the Gospel.

In fact, you have an obligation to not to call or follow a shepherd that does not come through the door, but instead leads by deceptive teaching.

Which leads us to why Jesus said, “I am the door of the sheep”. In next week’s Gospel Jesus says that he is the way, and besides him, there is no other way. If I or another shepherd would seek to lead you through some other way, I would destroy you spiritually. If I told you to find restful assurance of salvation in your own good works, rest is not what you would find. The Pharisees did that by teaching that the way to God was better keeping of the law. Instead of rest, their people grew wearier under the weight of guilt.

True shepherds must lead God’s flock to God’s Son. For he is, as he will say later, the Good Shepherd. He is the ultimate guide, protector, and teacher of all under-shepherds and all sheep.

As the Good Shepherd Jesus says that he is also the ultimate savior of the sheep. He did what no other shepherd can do: He laid down his life for the sheep and took it up again. By His willing sacrifice and resurrection, Jesus shed His blood to forgive our sins. Instead of the death we deserve, He gave us true life.

This life is abundant, a word that means “more than”. A life of peace through the forgiveness of sins, both here and eternally hereafter, is more than any kind of life without Jesus.

While the ultimate Shepherd is Jesus, He is, for his under- shepherds, the door through which they are to lead believers to grow in the green pastures and rest in the secure fold of God’s promises.

Identifying the gatekeeper, could be an exercise in overthinking this analogy. Scholars disagree with one another. They have said either, “We don’t know and it’s not important to know” or it’s John the Baptist, or it’s the Holy Spirit, or it’s Jesus himself, or the Bible, or God the Father.

Perhaps it is none of or all of the above, but I would call the gatekeeper the Grace of God. It is God’s grace that draws us to Jesus as the door to God. By the grace of God, the Holy Spirit works faith to follow shepherds

who lead and comfort us with Gods' Words and Sacraments. It is by grace that door to eternal green pastures and still waters is open to all believers. So as sheep and shepherds of the Good Shepherd, let us follow him now in trusting and joyful obedience that we may be with him forever. Amen