

Fourth Sunday of Easter – 2020

Good Shepherd Sunday

Acts 2:42-47

1 Peter 2:19-25

John 10:1-10

Authentication. You know the word because you have seen a lot of suspense thrillers, high-tech movies about how thieves and robbers gain access to valuable targets. Authentication. All these high value targets have security measures in place to prevent thieves and robbers from dispossessing institutions of their possessions. Authentication. If you have an ATM card, then you have a low-level form of personal authentication. If you're like most of humanity, your Personal Identification Number, your PIN, is your anniversary or a child's birthday or the day you graduated from high school or something easier to remember like 1-2-3-4. Authentication. Sometimes you have to prove who you are. Sometimes, in order for you to gain access to a place you genuinely belong, you still have to prove who you are. Why is that? Because people lie to get into places that they don't belong. I have no business in a nuclear reactor facility. I'm super glad they have a high-level authentication system at San Onofre Nuclear Power Plant.

Do you know what is the highest value target in God's eyes? It's not Fort Knox. Do you know what the Lord God Almighty protects with the highest security measures imaginable? It's not The North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD). It's the sheepfold; it's this courtyard, this body of believers; it's the One, Holy, Christian, and Apostolic Church. What is the highest value entity which God Himself guards with the strictest measures? It is you. That is the highest compliment that you will ever receive, and it is not me who pays you this compliment; it is the Lord Christ.

Listen to Him: "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. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens." Jesus has been authenticated. The true Shepherd, the authentic Shepherd is only going to have access to the sheep if He enters through the door. Only the Gatekeeper is going to open the door. The midnight rambler jumps the garden wall. He is a thief and a robber. Fence flippers, inauthentic pretenders, those who masquerade as angelic shepherds but have no genuine credentials, the Gatekeeper doesn't open the door for them. The door! You've got to know what the door is and who is this Gatekeeper who opens it.

Jesus is the authentic Shepherd, the Good Shepherd. The Gatekeeper is His Father. He's the one who opens the door so that the Messianic Shepherd can have unfettered access to the sheep. What is the door? What is the authenticating door? What is the door that proves who the Shepherd is? The door is the cruel cross. The door is the saving cross. The door is the justifying cross. The door is the holy cross. The only way that God's Son has access to you is by way of His sacrifice, the cross which His Father prepared for Him, which Jesus gladly mounted to demonstrate who He was, who He is. Take this door from me, yet not my will, yours be done. Now my soul is troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this door'? But for this very purpose I have come to this door. Father, glorify your name.

The crucified Shepherd is the only Shepherd who has access to the sheepfold. He has authenticated His Messianic authority, authenticated His Messianic love, authenticated His Messianic singularity. Your heavenly Father opened the door of the cross so that this Singular Man, this Divine Person, this Holy Son of the Holy Father could atone for your sin, paying with His precious blood and thereby claim you as His own. Validation – only the Lord Christ, with His wounds and His cross – only He has access to us. Your heavenly Father, the One who loves you immensely, gives you this Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd's voice is now in your ear. He speaks to you of His salvation, His grace, His kingdom through His living Word. You being here on this day is a living illustration of the veracity (the truthfulness) of His teaching. **What Jesus preached two thousand years ago is being played out in our lives.** Why is that? Because He, when He preached this bit in John 10, fully intended to serve His church as the Good Shepherd until the Last Day. **What Jesus preached two thousand years ago is being played out in our lives.** Why is that? Because He is active among us, accomplishing His purposes for us, a humble sheepfold, by being our very present Good Shepherd. That is His will. That is His desire.

Has anyone ever stolen something from you? It isn't pleasant. Has anyone ever broken into your home, rifled through your jewelry, turned your mattress upside down, made off with sentimental items? A bicycle, a car stereo, the whole car; has anyone every stolen something from you? Are there thieves out there who want more than material items? What does Satan want to steal? Who will he use to get it? The professor of evolution... what is he trying to steal? The hedonist cultural talking head, what is she trying to steal? How much are you listening to those whose siren song is pure deception, those who are intent on taking your innocence, your hope, your faith. Do you know the difference between the truth and the half truths that Satan traffics in? Tell me, who is better able to stand against the assaults of Satan – the one who continually hears the voice of the Good Shepherd or the Christmas and Easter sheep who hears His voice only after great intervals? God the Father places an extraordinarily high value on your soul. What value do you place on it?

False shepherds, devils in shepherd's clothing – what do they want to steal? Right now, presently – what is the black-market peddling that would rob you of hope, trust, confidence, and peace? Fear. False shepherds are peddling fear. False shepherds want access to your heart and mind. Fear is their entry point. Thieves attack at our weakest points. If you are insecure (and we are all insecure in some measure) then thieves will prey on your greatest insecurity, steal from you by providing a false answer to your doubts. If you are beautiful then the thief will inspire you to trust in cosmetics and keep you from discovering true beauty. If you are rich then the thief will move you to trust in your wealth and by so doing impoverish you on a deeper level. Don't let 'em. What's the answer?

St. Paul said this: "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). Our faith doesn't rest on men's wisdom, but on the power of God (1 Corinthians 2:5). After the Good Shepherd sacrificed Himself on the holy cross, after He shed His blood to pay the price for your sins, He was laid in the tomb. He confronted death by dying. Death couldn't hold the Messiah. The tomb couldn't stay shut, couldn't hold our King, couldn't exercise lordship over the Son of God. He is risen. Alive! Bounding out of the tomb He can't think of anything He'd rather do than shepherd you, lead you. Thomas saw the authenticating

wounds in Jesus hands and side and Thomas' words are on our lips: "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28). The crucified King loves to shepherd you. He gives you His body to eat and His blood to drink. He leads you to the still waters of your baptism, the green pastures of this Divine Service.

You have a Good Shepherd and He is leading you through the valley of the shadow of this broken creation. He knows what you go through. He has lived a life on this earth, much like yours. He knows your temptations and your fears (Hebrews 4:15); He knows that the world harasses you and leaves you feeling helpless (Matthew 9:36). He loves to shepherd you – to console you with His Word, to uplift you with His teaching, to guide you toward His heaven. He came that you may have life, and have it abundantly. This morning we have life to the full.

One last thing: after the disciples clearly didn't catch Jesus' drift, He made a marvelous connection. Jesus makes sure that you know that He and His cross are never separated. The door which the Gatekeeper opens is His death at Calvary. His bloody cross is the authenticating act of Messianic Identity. Then Jesus says that He Himself is the door. "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door to the sheep" (John 10:7). His death is eternal, His sacrifice is our perpetual hope, His crucified flesh is the open door of heaven and we have, even now, entered that door. Christ and His cross is the only door of grace, the only door of life, the only door to the sheep. We follow Him; no other. The Lord Christ is our Shepherd, our crucified and risen Shepherd, our Good, Good, Super-Good Shepherd.