

Fourth Sunday of Easter – May 11, 2014
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

John 10:1-10 (NIV)

"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.

Dear friends in Christ:

It's embarrassing to see a familiar face and then not to be able to recall their name or how you know them. Here are a few suggestions I've heard on how to handle this kind of situation on a web blog recently. The most obvious is to just say politely, "I'm sorry, I don't recall your name." But if you don't want to be quite so obvious you try some of these suggestions.

If the name is on the tip of your tongue but you're drawing a blank; well here's the perfect comment. "I know I know your name, but I'm blanking right now." You could always take out your phone and ask them to help you update your contact information. Or in a business context you might try this: "Hey, I'd love to get your card."

And it can never hurt to pay someone a compliment to lead them to ignore the fact that you can't recall their name. "Wow, you have a terrific memory. I can't believe you remember my name from that meeting six months ago. I can't remember the names of people I met yesterday! So of course I have to ask you your name." Or you might try greeting them with a hand shake as you say your own name; "Charlie, Charlie Heup."

Or how about this: "Remind me – what's your last name?" If you ask a person for his last name, he's likely to repeat both names. "Doe, John Doe."

Or maybe you can try the *one-sided introduction*. "Hey," you say to the person whose name you can't remember, "let me introduce you to Pat Smith." You introduce the two and say the name of the person whose name you remember. Almost always, the nameless person will volunteer his or her name.

It's embarrassing to forget a name but most people are quite forgiving of the fact that we can't remember their names. But they are also quite flattered when we do remember their names. It says that we care about them and that they are important to us.

Jesus cares about us and we are important to him – so important that as we are assured in our text:

Theme: Jesus Calls us by Name

1. To lead us to safety
2. To provide us with life

The words of our text were addressed to the Jewish Pharisees who claimed to know God but who failed to recognize Jesus as their Savior from sin. In effort to help them as well as all the other people in his audience see that he was the one promised in the OT scriptures Jesus speaks of himself as a Shepherd – these people would surely have been familiar with passages like the 23rd Psalm which proclaims: **The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.** They would have recalled Isaiah's and Ezekiel's descriptions of the Lord: (Isaiah 40:11) **He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.** (Ezekiel 34:12) **As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep.**

Jesus' words were intended to indicate that he was the promised Christ. They give us a wonderful picture of the work of our Savior that reminds us of the personal care and attention which we receive from our Savior.

Jesus says, **"Very truly I tell you ... 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."**

At night when the shepherds would lead their sheep into town they would put their sheep in a stone-walled pen with a single entrance. The pen would protect the sheep from predators and keep them from wandering off on their own. A watchman would guard the entry to make sure no un-welcomed guests would enter while the shepherds would sleep. Anyone who would have to sneak into the pen would be up to no good and the sheep would realize that – such a person would not be able to call the sheep by name. They wouldn't really care about the sheep. They had only their own selfish interests in mind.

How different it is when the shepherd enters the pen – he is not only known by the guard and granted admittance through the door, but his voice is familiar and soothing to his sheep. They recognize his voice – he calls them by name to lead them out to pasture.

As Jesus spoke we might have expected that his listeners would have at least understood some of his illustration. The sheep were God's chosen people. The strangers and thieves were those who would harm God's people. Jesus was the Shepherd sent by God to care for his flock. Yet our text tells us that **they did not understand what he was telling them.**

They did not follow his voice because they were not part of God's flock. They rejected his call to follow him and turned their backs on the safety that he offered. Jesus knows us by name; he calls to us through his Word. He calls us away from our enemies and offers to lead us to safe pastures where we can dwell in peace and security – protected from all those who would seek to harm us by leading us away from God.

Jesus persisted in his efforts to get his point across to those who were refusing to recognize him as the promised Messiah by telling them another parable which built on the imagery of his first parable. This parable was even more pointed than the first. **"Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep."** Jesus speaks very clearly. He is the one who provides safety for the sheep.

Perhaps it's a bit puzzling for us to understand the connection with the previous parable. We might wonder how Jesus could be both the gate and the Good Shepherd who comes through the gate. It's possible of course that Jesus is using two separate illustrations. But there is also a way that Jesus could have been making a connection between the shepherd and the gate. The sheep pen that we talked about previously was found in the

towns – but there were also sheep pens located in the county – in the fields. In that situation there would be no watchman. The shepherd would lie down in front of the opening to the pen while he slept. He would protect the sheep and provide them with safety with his own body and life.

This is one of Jesus' great "I Am" statements. His words were filled with OT scriptural references. Many of the Jews would have regard God as the great "I Am." When God identified himself to Moses at the burning bush he identified himself as "I AM WHO I AM. God told Moses to tell the people in Egypt whom he planned to rescue from their slavery that I AM had sent him to them. Jesus was deliberately identifying himself as the I AM God who had come to provide safety for his people as the Good Shepherd. In words that follow our text Jesus will proclaim: (John 10:11-15) **"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep ... I know my sheep and my sheep know me-- 15) just as the Father knows me and I know the Father--and I lay down my life for the sheep."** With this figure of speech Jesus prophecies his work at Calvary where he laid down his life on the cross in payment for our sins to give us safety, salvation and life.

There had been false prophets and teachers who did not find Christ in the Scriptures and who did not point God's people to their Savior. Fortunately God's people did not listen to them and were not deceived by them. Jesus explains.

All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. 9) I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He 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.

It is only through Jesus and his atoning work as our Good Shepherd that we are saved. He is the only Savior and he is the one who calls us by name to give us life.

Someone has said that Jesus gives us life without the big IF in the middle. With Jesus life takes on meaning and has an eternal future.

Through his work Jesus gives us real life which forgives sin, frees people from guilt, removes the fears of everyday life and ultimately lasts for all eternity in heaven. As Jesus says he came to give us life that is more than enough. He gives a life like no one else can. He gives an abundance of grace. The apostle John reminds us that all of the many blessings we enjoy as God's children are from his grace. (John 1:16) **Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given.**

Together with these blessings of grace we enjoy a sense of joy that only comes from our relationship with our Lord. Indeed it is possible that as Christians we are filled with joy even in the midst of trouble just like the Macedonians that Paul wrote about in (2 Corinthians 8:2) **Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.**

Jesus also provides us with a peace that lasts because of his promises.

(John 14:27) **Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.**

And finally Jesus gives us the ability to live for him, free from our slavery to sin and Satan. Jesus is the life giver in every sense of the word.

Thanks be to God that Jesus calls us by name to lead us to safety and to give us life. Amen.