

John 10:1-10

Easter 4; May 3, 2020

For the last number of years, there has been a duck that has built a nest and laid her eggs in the courtyard here at church. It is an outdoor space that is completely surrounded by the walls of the school and the church. In many ways, it is a space that is very well protected. Recently the little ducks were born. Last week, as I looked out my office window, I watched them for a while. You could immediately see the special relationship that the ducklings had with their mother. When the mother called, the ducklings would come from wherever they were to line up behind mom. Sometimes, mom would fly away to get food for them. When she came back, they all came toward her. Other times, mom would fly off only to sit up on the roof. As the ducklings moved around in the courtyard, mom would move along the roof so that she could see her babies. You could tell that she was protecting them. At times, I don't think the ducklings were aware that mom was up on the roof watching their every move. (If you looked at our Facebook page here at our church, you saw some of the pictures that I had taken of them.) They were just fascinating to watch.

As I watched those ducks, I was beginning to work on my sermon for this week. I thought, what a perfect picture of our text this weekend. I thought of Jesus being like that mother duck. Jesus is our Good Shepherd who supplies all we need. Jesus watches over us even when we think that he is nowhere to be seen. As we continue our series on the theme: **What do we do when our plans fall through, when we don't want to listen to the voice of our Good Shepherd?**

How many of you who are watching or reading this sermon have spent much time among sheep? I've not. Do we fully understand this picture that Jesus is painting for us today in these words in John? When God wanted to talk about the special relationship that God had with His people, he called them sheep and himself Shepherd. He used that picture on purpose because a Shepherd would have a special relationship with his sheep. When we think of sheep, we think of them living on farms inside a fence and letting them eat grass. This would have been a different picture for Jesus' hearers. When a shepherd would take his sheep out to eat grass, the sheep would have to eat over a vast area. There would not have been grass like we think of in this area. Sheep would have to be let out into the open country looking for bits of grass here and there. A shepherd's sheep weren't the only herd in that open country. Other shepherds would let their sheep wander into the same open country. Sheep are not the smartest animals. They are helpless against predators. They don't have fangs or a loud bark. They don't have any natural camouflage to help protect them. They don't have even basic survival instincts.

As these sheep wandered into these vast areas with other groups, how did the shepherd get his own sheep back? Even though sheep are not the smartest and strongest of animals, they have an ability that most other animals don't have. They learn the voice of their shepherd. When their shepherd calls them, they will follow the voice of THEIR shepherd. They can't feed themselves, defend themselves, find water for themselves, but they can follow the voice of only their shepherd. But sometimes sheep don't want to follow the voice of their shepherd. It might not be that they can't, it is because they don't want to listen to that voice.

How often don't we do the same thing? We know the voice of our shepherd, but we don't want to listen. And we can convince ourselves of almost anything. It's easy to listen to other voices. There are all kinds of voices that are around us trying to lead us away from our Good Shepherd. It is so easy to follow them. Sadly, there are times that we listen to these voices. All because we are looking for something better, something sweeter, something different than what Jesus has to offer. But the voice of our Good Shepherd wants to provide for us and keep us safe.

After the sheep were out in the pasture for the day, the Shepherd would lead them back to safety. They were led back to the sheep pen. The sheep pens were much different than we might picture them today. They made the sheep pens out of rocks. Their sheep pens had solid walls. Their sheep pens were fortified. There was only one entrance to the sheep pen. The gate for the sheep pen was often the shepherd himself. He would even lay his body down across the entrance as he slept through the night. You would have to go through the Shepherd to get into or out of the sheep pen. He keeps his sheep safely in the sheep pen.

What a fantastic picture of Jesus. Our Good Shepherd keeps us safe. All those robbers and thieves would be kept away. All the voices that were trying to lead the sheep away were silenced. What a comfort that is for us today. Not only are

there the voices that are trying to lead us away from Jesus, there are voices trying to get us to not trust the voice of our shepherd. Today, you and I live with so many uncertainties around us. Those uncertainties that try to take our peace away. No one loves those uncertainties. They fill us with fear as we hear both good news and bad news with this COVID-19 virus. You see that in parents as they try to juggle all different things in their life. They have become teachers. They have become employees at home. Doing all of those things as husbands and wives. Stress levels in homes and families have risen as they try to listen to all the voices around them.

Yet, Jesus wants us to know that he is our Good Shepherd. He is the Gate. He will take care of us through all these uncertainties. We have a Shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep – who laid down his life for us. We have a Good Shepherd who not only just gives us life, but gives us a full life. Listen to the words of Jesus: **“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”** Jesus is not calling you to a dull life that is filled with rules. He is calling you to a life that is free from the chains of sin. Jesus came into this world to not just give us life, but that we have it to the full! There is only one person who has paid for every sin that you have done. That person is Jesus, our Good Shepherd.

Listen to the voice of your Good Shepherd. You have a shepherd who has a very special and personal relationship with you. Listen to his voice, and not to the voice of the devil that makes lies seem so beautiful. You have a Good Shepherd who has gathered you into his pen and protects you. You have a Good Shepherd who has given you a life to the full. Enjoy that life in him. Amen.