

Abundant Life
John 10:1-10
April 30, 2023

The texts for today deal with a shepherd and sheep. We think Jesus knew about carpentry from His step-father Joseph but many times Jesus talks of sheep and shepherds. I guess He should know about them too as He is the one who made them to begin with. We have the 23rd Psalm as the Psalm for today. Many people pick this Psalm as their favorite Psalm and in fact may list it as the favorite text from the Bible.

When I was growing up, I still remember Mom saying she would give us kids a quarter if we memorized the 23rd Psalm. It seemed like it was such a long passage and yet as you see in the lessons for today, the Psalm is only 6 verses long. Many of you have quite a few more verses memorized than just these 6.

Jesus may have been a carpenter but how did He refer to Himself? He talked of things like being the light of the world or maybe bread from heaven but the one reference that really sticks out to me and probably to you is when He refers to Himself as the Shepherd of the sheep.

Shepherds today, especially in this area are not quite like those of Jesus' day. It seems sheep were brought in for the night to a shelter of some kind. Evidently there was someone who stayed with them, watching the gate so that they couldn't get out where wild animals could get at them.

Most sheep, if not farm flocks are out, by themselves, sometimes with a guard dog to keep them safe. In some ways they are at the mercy of the wild animals out there if those who would ruin their lives aren't taken care of. Even with a shepherd penning up their sheep, there still can be those who would come to seek, kill and destroy.

I was talking with my neighbor a couple days ago and even though she had her sheep penned up, a mountain lion and her cubs got in, and killed two of her lambs. No, she wasn't watching over her flock by night but thought she had done enough to keep her sheep safe. It wasn't enough and she will have to do more in the future to protect her flock.

Jesus in the Gospel lesson for today talks of those two legged mountain lions that seek to get at the sheep. He begins by talking about them climbing in to sheep pen. They have nothing good in mind but their own desires and wants. There is nothing good to come about for those sheep if they are left to go through the sheep. It

is only the shepherd that has something good for the sheep. He is the one who watches over the sheep, leading them out in the morning and bringing them back into the fold at night. The sheep know his voice and they will come to him and follow him as they know that he will take them to those green pastures and still waters.

The sheep don't know the voice of intruders. They will bunch up at the back of the pen from them and even though the thieves may talk to them, they know the voice they follow and will not follow the robber.

Jesus told that story and yet the people He was speaking to did not understand what He was saying. It was only when He reframed the story He had laid out before them that they understood about the sheep pen and the gate to go in and out of.

Thieves and robbers don't ring the door bell and go through a protected door to get in. They will try to find another way, a way where those inside won't expect them to come. Jesus said those before Him were like that. Who came before? So many who led the people of God astray, making it seem they were good shepherds only to lead people away from God

Jesus is saying He is the door, the gate to go out and come back in. Through Him and Him alone are the sheep safe. He is the Good Shepherd that will lead them out and bring them back in, all the while looking over them to protect them from the outside world that would like nothing better than to take them away from their shepherd.

Jesus is trying to tell the people listening to Him, to us and to all who pick up His Word and read this account that there are many who would seek to draw people away from God. As you read through the Old Testament, how many times where the people of God drawn away from God? It seems like it was happening all the time. They would be drawn away and then God would have to do things, to have things happen to bring them back. Many times, it was very bad things that God used to help them to see how life lived with God as their shepherd was the best way.

A good shepherd wants the best for sheep. They are his livelihood. He depends on the sheep to multiply and produce lambs, year after year that can be used to supply his needs and through his generous giving, some of the needs of others. Some good grass and clean water and the benefit of the Lord, the shepherd will have another lamb crop to sell. If all works well, he can have another great, abundant year.

Jesus knew that. He talks of the thief that only wants to steal, kill and destroy but the Shepherd, Jesus Himself has come to bring life and not just some miserable life where there is not peace but an abundant life.

When we think of that kind of life, what do most people think of when they think of an abundant life? With the thousands that are coming over the border everyday, what are they thinking of as where they can get their idea of the abundant life? They look to this nation as a land where they too might find their lives as lives lived abundantly.

The Salvation Army works on that idea as well in taking care of the needs of people first and then bringing them the Good News of Jesus. There are others though who have been going through great physical hardships recognizing that there are things more needed than just the physical and want what God has for them in His Word.

I guess when this last group has had to deal with things like hunger and death that once they know how short this life is and how long eternity is, to have their souls taken care of is so much more important than a stomach that so soon be crying for more.

You may be saying the Word of God should be regular fare as well and yet it is the Word that sustains along with the sacraments of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, God Himself that truly satisfies.

Jesus knew that it was by His leading and His leading alone that the sheep would find that kind of life. Yes, people try to fill themselves with all sorts of things but it is only in Jesus that they can have the life of abundance He was talking about.

You may have watched some religious programing that talk of abundance and that somehow if you do your part, if you do what they say is right in the eyes of God, then God can do nothing other than to bless you with the goods of this world. But is that the kind of abundance Jesus is talking about?

Our sinful human nature likes to see things that way. If I do this, surely God will want nothing more than to bless me. Instead of our seeing ourselves as sinners who, on our own could never please God, no matter what sort of "GOOD" things we do, we want to think we are not as bad as the other guy or have done so many more good things than bad so God would surely look on us with favor.

That is the way the world works and that is how those thieves that crawl into the sheep pen work. They know sinful human nature. They know how to use it to their benefit in this world.

Jesus knows of the right way, His way, the way through Him as when He said that He was the way, the truth and the life and that no one can enter into the presence of the Father except through Him. (John 14:6 ESV)

The way to those green pastures, to that abundant life is through Jesus. Jesus came to bring life to those who look to Him. He came knowing that He would have to be the Shepherd to give up His life for the sheep. He knew that ole mountain lion, the serpent, the devil came with lies to lead the sheep away from their shepherd.

The devil is smart. He is always sneaking around to see who he can steal from Jesus, those who cost Him His very life. He wants to kill and destroy as He has been cast out from the presence of God and now sees that he is doomed to hell forever. He wants others to suffer as he is and will. He knows that he can hurt God by pulling away those Jesus paid the ultimate price for who believe what He did was for them.

The devil has many helpers in the spirit world and in this physical world as well. He will pull out all stops to see to it that we are pulled away. Yes, the devil as many have said, already has the unbelievers so he can focus all his efforts on us and others who believe that Jesus is the Good Shepherd who is in charge of the gate to everlasting, abundant life.

Yes, we may be tempted by the things of this world. There is so much to offer, especially in this country that the Lord has blessed more than any other nation ever it would seem. So many have utilized the things of this nation to raise themselves up from poverty to riches. Yes, we might see this as the American dream and yet it is not only the physical riches that this nation is known for but for the spiritual as well.

This nation has been seen as a Christian nation and yet as we look around today, do we see Christ as prominent as He once was in the lives of the people of this nation? Maybe we too have seen a waning in His prominence in our day to day lives as well.

Jesus wants all to have an abundant life. His abundant life may not be dollars in the bank but a life lived, knowing that with all the abundance of this nation, it can never compare to the abundance that awaits all who believe and are baptized.

Abundant life, we all want it. So many seek that in the things of this world, yet there is another abundant life that we have and that is a life lived in the certainty of what lies ahead. We look forward to eternal life but even now, life lived in the door Jesus is a life where He is watching over us, even now, to keep the thieves from crawling into our lives by some other way.