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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY
Fourth Sunday of Easter (Series A)
May 11, 2014
Text: John 10:1–10

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We're quite used to hearing that Jesus is the Good Shepherd. Psalm 23 automatically comes to mind when we hear those words. Less familiar to us is the idea that Jesus is the door of the sheep. That's what the Lord calls Himself in vs. 7 of today's gospel reading. Jesus the Good Shepherd; Jesus the door of the sheep. Both figures of speech are intimately related to each other and proclaim God's goodness and our divine fortune through the Lord Jesus Christ.

John 10 begins, however, with a cautionary note: "...he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber." There's danger out there for God's people. That's the essential point. As you know, thieves and robbers want to take unlawfully that which doesn't belong to them. To accomplish their sinister desire, thieves will often use stealth, trickery, and deceit. Thieves don't send a courtesy notice saying that they will enter your house on May 12th at 12:35 a.m. They sneak in when you least expect it. Or maybe they try to befriend their victims to learn their habits and gain their trust so as to make the robbery all the more sinister. You get the point.

God's people face an old evil foe who wants, according to Jesus in vs. 10, "to steal and kill and destroy." Satan and his fallen angels hate God, His works and His ways and any and everything associated with them. Among other things, that means the demons hate us. We are the sheep of the Lord's pasture; we are most precious and dear to our Lord.

And it's good to be one of God's sheep. That's basically what King David is saying in his famous Psalm 23. He's boasting in the fact that he belongs to God. Let me give you an interpretive paraphrase of Psalm 23 that will illustrate what I'm saying.

The Lord is my shepherd and boy, do I have it good! I don't lack anything for He gives me the best food in the plushiest pastures. The water is to die for. No frightening currents or waves, just still, cool, refreshing waters. And if something happens, the Lord restores me to perfection by His love and grace. The paths He guides me on are safe and secure leading to righteousness and joy. And the Lord does this for my good and His glory; keeping me on the straight and narrow with His rod and staff. Even though I may be surrounded by agents of death – wolves, foxes, lions, bears, everything that wants to rip me apart – I'm safe with Him. They can't touch me. And not only that, my Shepherd prepares a feast of good food in their presence just to show'em up. Nothing evil can happen to me when I'm with my Shepherd. He gives me soothing oil from time to time. My fortunes seem to be unlimited. And on top of all that, He loves me so much that I will dwell with Him forever, in His very house! That's my Shepherd, the Lord.

Dear sheep of the Lord, isn't that good news? Even a city boy like me can resonate with such a figure of speech even though I've never been on a ranch more than a day! I've certainly never raised sheep.

But the Thief wants to steal that away from you. The Devil tried to defeat the Shepherd, the Lord Jesus, but he failed. Jesus defeated the devil in the wilderness temptations; our Lord resisted the demonic suggestion from Peter to bypass the cross of Good Friday; Jesus submitted to His Father's will in the Garden of Gethsemane when the devil tried to get Jesus to do His own will rather the Father's; our Lord even resisted the sly demonic temptation when the scribes and Pharisees told a suffering Jesus that if He came down from the cross they would believe in Him. Each and every time, the Good Shepherd remained faithful and true!

Since the devil can't destroy Jesus, he sets his ravenous appetite on you. Don't gloss over what Jesus says of Satan, he "comes only to steal and kill and destroy." So we might ask, "How does the devil go about stealing, killing, and destroying?" There's no single answer to this question. The devil has his works and ways too and they are varied and multitudinous. But in general, his works fall under two categories: 1) deception and 2) accusation. Revelation 12:9–10 describes the Devil as the deceiver and accuser of the world.

The devil will try to deceive you with everything and anything that will take your eyes and ears off of Jesus. He will use sinful things, to be sure. Those are the methods most easily identified. Very few people will say that murder and lying and greed and

arrogance and so forth are good. What's trickier is that Satan will use good things to serve his evil purposes. He will use a parent's love, the goodness of creation, the good intentions of pastors and friends, the normal desire for love, security, virtue, excitement, and so forth to deceive people and bring people to the depths of unbelief and evil. Anytime a good thing becomes higher and more important than God, that good thing becomes an evil used by Satan to keep us from Jesus. And the devil does it every day. It's not without reason the Bible says Satan disguises himself as an angel of light (II Cor. 11:14).

He also uses accusation. I'm sure most of you have felt that awful idea: I've sinned again. God can't love me because I just keep on sinning again and again and again and again. And the devil steps in and says, "Yeah, you're right. God doesn't want to forgive you anymore. I mean, come on. That *70 times 7* thing and *the steadfast love of the Lord* can't possibly apply to someone who just keeps on sinning like you. You're just a sham, a hypocrite. Quit pretending. This faith and trust thing can't work with your sort of person. Just pack it in, you'll be happier anyway."

And if that accusation doesn't work, then Satan will accuse God in your own mind and heart. It goes something like this: "Just look at God. He gives that Christian over there prosperity, happiness, blessings upon blessings; what's He given you? He's says He's fair and loving and impartial but anybody can see He has favorites and you're not one of them; He's fickle and untrustworthy. Who needs Him anyway?"

But that's where Jesus, the Good Shepherd, steps in and speaks words of truth. "The sheep hear (my) voice," says Jesus, "and (I) call (my) own sheep by name and lead them out...A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers" (vs. 3, 5). Whenever the devil deceives and accuses, the Lord steps in with His rod and staff to care for His beloved sheep. Later, in John 10:28 we hear Jesus say, "I give (my sheep) eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand."

And just to make sure we understand the Lord's absolute, unwavering commitment to His sheep, the Lord says – almost quite literally – the devil gets to you, My most precious sheep, over my dead body! Look at vs. 7 again, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep." In the ancient Middle Eastern world, sheep pens were made from a tall, solid wall. The only way into the sheep pen was through a single, small opening. They didn't use gates, like with think of with hinges, latches, and locks. The door of the sheep was the shepherd who laid himself across the opening

while the sheep were inside. To get to the sheep, you had to go over the shepherd, quite literally. Now listen to what Jesus says again in vs. 9–10, “I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” Because the Shepherd did lay down His life and raise it up again 3 days later, we are saved and brought into the joyous safety of His Church. The next time the Devil tries to deceive you tell him, “Go talk to my Shepherd. I’ve only got ears for Him.” And when the Devil tries to accuse you tell him, “You’ve got to go through Jesus before you can get to me; He’s the door to the sheep. He laid down His life for Me. And now He lives and reigns throughout eternity for my good. You gotta go through Him before coming to me!”

The Devil, the world, and even your own sinful flesh want us to think that true joy and happiness comes from sin and the fleeting pleasures of this life. But the resurrected Shepherd desires to give you abundant life. The devil wants to give you a temporary sugar-high that leaves you flat and dull but the Lord gives the abundance of a full, robust life that endures now and throughout eternity.

I am the Good Shepherd and the Door of the sheep, says Jesus. Come, follow Me to the joys of My verdant pasture.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.