

2014\_05\_11 Good Shepherd  
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL  
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## **A Voice You Can Trust**

John 10:1-10

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A preliminary note: In John 10, Jesus is portrayed as both the Door to the sheepfold and the Good Shepherd who enters that Door to the sheepfold. At first this might seem confusing, how both fit together. It might be better to translate: “entrance.” In this way, Jesus is pictured both as the only one who has access to the sheepfold and then as Chief Shepherd, He becomes the only one who grants access to the sheepfold. Regardless, our focus today is on one thing: the voice of Jesus.

### ***John 10:1–10***

*[Jesus said ...] “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. <sup>2</sup> But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup> To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup> And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. <sup>5</sup> Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” <sup>6</sup> Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them.*

*<sup>7</sup> Then Jesus said to them again, “Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. <sup>8</sup> All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. <sup>9</sup> I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. <sup>10</sup> The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.*

Grace and peace to you in Jesus, our Good Shepherd, to those redeemed in His blood,

He was lost in a sea of strangers. They had come to the Amusement Park together – mom, dad, brother, sister; but where had they gone? It was enticing picture which had caught his attention: ice cream! It sure was hot out and he wanted some ice cream. That’s when he wandered off. A little boy looks around and those familiar voices were no where to be found.

He is lost in a sea of strangers. A man approaches him and asks: “are you lost, son?” The boy is not sure how to respond. “He reminds me a little of grandpa,” he thinks. “But why did he call me his son? I know grandpa and I know my dad, but I don’t know this man.” The man says, “follow me, I will help you.” The boy is not sure – should he follow this man? Can this voice be trusted?

It is something every parent fears: a lost child. And so we teach our children not to talk to strangers. So we ask our children questions like: what do you do if someone pulls up in a car and asks you to help him find his lost puppy? And so we teach our children not to talk to strangers; to never get in the car of someone without talking to your parents first; we teach them to go rely on a voice they can trust: mom and dad.

There are many strange voices out there. There are many voices in the world. There are many voices that cannot be trusted. They threaten us all – they say things like: there must be some other way; Jesus can’t be the only way to heaven; Christianity can’t be the only religion that’s right; the Bible can’t be the only source of truth about God. These voices are all around and they are trying to get access to the sheep by some other way. Yet, to whom does the doorkeeper open? To what voice do the sheep respond? The voice of your Good Shepherd is a voice you can trust.

### **1. As He calls by name in baptism**

The boy was lost in a sea of strangers; he was not sure if he should follow this man. But just before he took this man by the hand, another voice calls and it calls him by name. Where did it come from? He looked around and could see nothing. But he heard it – it was dad. Dad was calling his name. And before he could respond, he was picked up and embraced – Dad had found his lost boy.

This is a picture of how we are born into this world – a child lost in a sea of strange voices. All around pictures entice us to wander off; they show us something that looks so good, so appealing. We’re born into a sea of strangers and we are strangers ourselves. A sinful flesh confuses us in this strange crowd. We are enticed toward what will make us happy, what will satisfy our desire, what we need to do to look out for ourselves. Voices begin to surround and confuse us until we begin to think this is just the way its supposed to be – it’s survival of the fittest; we’re on our own to fix things; its up to me to make a better life for myself, its up to man to make this world a better place. “Are you lost?”

He was a child lost in a sea of strangers. He was lost until he heard that voice. A voice called out and called him by name: “Braxton Richard Wakeley.”

*2 But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.*

The door is the entrance to the sheepfold. It is also the way out to pasture. Sheep cannot stay in the pen and expect to survive. They need food and water and exercise. Jesus alone is granted that unrestricted access to the sheep. It is His voice alone that will safely lead them out to still water, and through still waters.

There in the still water, the Good Shepherd calls us by name. In baptism, He calls out: “Braxton;” He leads him out, out of the world, to pasture, to salvation, to life. He proves that there is no other voice that can be trusted. The rest are thieves and robbers.

All other voices, all other religions, all other ways of thinking about God are filled with ulterior motives. They have not come by the door; but have climbed up another way. The door is the way to God and the way to life. It is the way of true righteousness which in no way serves self; but is right in every way. It is the way of sacrifice; the way of laying down one’s life, become last, choosing the worst; a way of perfect love for God and for the world. No other voice; no other philosophy will ever speak of this way. They ask you if you are lost, they offer a way to find life; but ultimately they only steal away life; they only lead you to trust in yourself; therefore, they cannot be trusted, they have not gone the way that Jesus has gone.

Jesus has gone the way of the cross, the way of being last, choosing the worst, the way of sacrifice. He has gone the way of righteousness and done what no other man has ever done – He laid down His life and taken it back again. He has risen from death. In His resurrection He became the entrance; He opened the door to eternal life – so that He is the only way to restoration; He is alone the source of goodness in God’s creative work and the gift of righteousness to all who enter by Him.

So we read earlier from Peter: *1 Peter 2:23–25 who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

So Jesus has both gained access and now owns access to the sheepfold; He is both the Shepherd and the Entrance. And here he calls to us – from the word, from the water, He washes us and makes us members of His flock. He knows and calls each His little lamb.

Before he can even see where this voice comes from, a child is picked up and embraced: God has found him.

## **2. As He shepherds you within the flock of baptized believers**

There is safety in family. Without his family, a child is hopelessly lost in a sea of strangers. But this child has been found, picked up, embraced by his father. Dad picks him up and holds him as if he will never let him go. He is safe now, back with the family.

The family vocation is the primary means by which God protects and provides for children. It is a special calling to be a parent. God not only uses a mom and dad to create life; but he entrusts them with sustaining that life: from feeding, to burping, to clothing, to changing diapers – from the dirtiest of jobs, to the most delightful of joys: parents are the vocation God uses to provide and protect children.

This extends to every corner of our life; especially a child's spiritual life. God works through vocation to provide and protect for a child's spiritual future. He works not only through parents and by extension, He works through the Church. Here in a flock of baptized believers, a child is gathered into the shepherding care of Jesus. Here in the Church, God shepherds his children.

And so that group of 1st century Christians were gathered in Jerusalem. We read in Acts 2 how there, on Pentecost, they were baptized and gathered into a shepherd's care. They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship; they broke bread together; they prayed together; they shared all things. Even though He had ascended into heaven, the voice of Jesus lived on. They were a family, called and baptized into the shepherding care of Jesus.

He does it through vocation. It was Peter's calling to speak. After Jesus had risen from the dead, he told Peter: if you love me, feed my sheep. It was a call into the work of shepherding. So that word 'pastor' means just that: shepherd. Through the Church, God appoints pastors to do the work of shepherding; through that office, the voice of Jesus speaks, He forgives, He protects, He leads, He gathers them into one teaching and one fellowship.

However, so easily that voice of the pastor begins to misrepresent and distort the voice of the True Shepherd. As the Lord said to Ezekiel the prophet: "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, 'thus says the Lord God to the

shepherds: ‘Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks?’ ... “As I live” says the Lord, surely because My flock became a prey, and My flock became food for every beast of the field, because there was no shepherd, nor did my shepherds search for My flock, but the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed My flock” ... “therefore I will save My flock and they shall no longer be a prey; and I will judge between sheep and sheep. I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them –<sup>o</sup> My servant David, He shall feed them and be their Shepherd” (Ezekiel 34:1,8).

David was once a shepherd and then a king; Jesus would fulfill that prophecy by becoming the shepherding king to Israel. His is the only voice to be trusted. And so the only pastor to be trusted is him who echoes the word of Christ; who speaks in His name; that is to say, He is faithful to Jesus; He seeks out the lost sheep; He speaks the truth of His word; and feed the flock with the gospel of salvation.

*2 But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ... 5 Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.”*

Sheep are helpless without a shepherd. And so God gathers us into His Shepherding care. As we gather to hear His Word, we find the safety of God’s family; we are picked up, embraced, and never let go; we find a voice we can trust.

### **3. As He leads you through suffering and danger to abundant pastures**

A child is found, embraced, and cared for by his family. His father and mother raise him in the Christian faith. They provide him with food, clothes to wear, a house to live in; they teach him about strangers and dangers: don’t touch the stove, don’t climb that ladder, don’t forget to wear a helmet. But eventually the time comes: the time for him to leave home; he leaves that place of security, the place of teaching, and he goes off into the world. What will happen now? Now that new strangers surround him? Now that new dangers threaten him?

It isn’t long before that child once lost at the amusement park now feels lost in another way. He faces things his parents could never fully prepare him for. He faces questions he can’t seem to answer.

Events unfold, his sins begins to twist life into a mess. Maybe its an addiction to drugs or alcohol. Maybe its the loss of a job. Maybe its the loss of someone close. Maybe its a

question regarding God that doesn't make sense to him. Voices surround him – strange voices telling him: you can no longer trust Him – that Jesus you thought was so reliable as a child, He can't save you now. Those were childish thoughts; and now you're grown up; it is up to you to survive now; it is up to you to decide your future. Mom and dad aren't around anymore – or maybe they were never really there to begin with.

A man approaches him and asks: "are you lost?" and I'm not sure how to respond. He is strange yet familiar. I know I shouldn't listen to strangers; but there is something familiar about his voice. He says, "follow me, I will lead you to safety." Can this voice be trusted?

It isn't until He reaches down his hand to take mine that I discover who this is. There on his wrists I see who this is. The scars show where the nails were driven through. This is Jesus: the One crucified for me; the one who has risen, and who lives for me. He calls me by name. And immediately it's as if I'm back at the Baptismal font again; I hear that familiar voice calling out to me and calling me out; He calls me out from those strangers and leads me to good pasture; this is a voice I can trust.

So the Lord also prophesied to Ezekiel:

"Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out... I will bring them out from the people and gather them and bring them to their own land; I will feed them in good pasture..."

This is a voice Braxton can trust. This is a voice every one of you can trust. Each of us will go through our own difficulties, our own dangers, our own questions. We will face our own sins and sinfulness, and we will face other people's sins and the pain others cause us. And yet who is it that calls you by name? Who is it who goes before you – facing the worst that sin and death has to inflict for you? Who is it who has risen and it is He who leads you to abundant life.

He won't allow you to stay penned up in this world; in the safety of your own ideas and survival tactics; in the midst of thieves and robbers. So He calls you out – through the difficulties and dangers, because He knows that beyond the difficulties; beyond the dangers – there are good pastures.

So the psalmist David writes:

*Psalm 23 A Psalm of David. The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in*

*the paths of righteousness For His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever.*

Beyond the valley of death is the pasture of life. He has come to give it to you and He has come that you might have it in abundance. So He has died your death and He has risen to give you His life. What lies beyond? His resurrection and yours: a restoration of all things good; still waters; green pastures – the restoration of your suffering body; the re-creation of this suffering world; and a new creation – that we might dwell in the presence of the Lord forever.

A child has been found. He has been embraced in the care of a family. And what has accomplished all this? A voice – a voice of a Shepherd; a voice that resonates in the Word today; a voice that can be trusted. So He says: “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”

In His name,

Amen.