

April 17, 2005  
4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter  
John 10:1-10  
Pastor Ott

## Enjoy Abundant Life

John 10 is the Good Shepherd chapter that started where Jesus tells this parable about the gate, and he uses a phrase that I think has often been twisted and turned and made into many other things than what it really is. He says, *“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full”*—or to have it abundantly as it is translated in some translations. When you hear having the abundant life or having the full life, what do you think about? Do you think about your banking account? Do you think about your health? Do you think about having all the things that you want? I’ve heard some Christian teachers stand in front of people and say, “God wants you to have the abundant life, so if you make your best vow to the Lord and send it to me, God will see to it that your sickness is gone, you have the new car you want, you have everything that you want for life because God has said he wants you to have the abundant life.”

It sounds appealing. It sounds intriguing. But it doesn’t sound anything at all like we heard in 1 Peter chapter 2 in our Second Lesson this morning, does it?—now for a little while you may have to suffer. God has told us over and over that as we live in this world we are going to face difficulties. We are in a world that is affected by sin. We are not in the perfect world God intended us to have. We are in a world that is ruined, that needs to be restored. We are in a world that has all kinds of problems because sin is in the world.

So what does it mean when God says to us that he has come that we may have life and have it to the full? What does it mean to us when God says I have come because I want you to enjoy abundant life? As we consider that this morning, we see that our Lord warns us. He warns us that there are going to be people that don’t come through the gate—which is through Jesus—they come in over the wall, through the side, or some other way because they are counterfeit shepherds that are thieves and robbers. They may offer what they consider to be the abundant life, but in reality it leads to destruction. In the verses right after our text, Jesus continues on and says not only is he the gate, he is the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. Those who come to him, through him, and bring us his message and his Word and his voice are going to give us abundant life.

That’s what you want. That’s what the person next to you wants. That’s what the person in front of you wants. That’s what the people that aren’t here this morning want even though they might be looking and following some of those counterfeit voices. This morning we will learn what it is and how we can share it with others.

Jesus tells this parable of *“I am the gate”*, *“I am the Good Shepherd”*—these “I am” statements in John right after he had healed the man that was born blind. Maybe you remember the story. They were walking along and there was a man born blind that had been begging all of his life. The disciples said to him, *“who sinned, this man or his*

*parents, that he was born blind?"* It is a common assumption people have. Do you remember Jesus' answer? Neither. I tell you this happened so that the glory of God might be revealed in his life. Then Jesus healed him of his blindness and this man went away rejoicing. Word, of course, gets out that something this incredible happened, but the leaders of the Jews were upset because this was the Sabbath. If you heal on the Sabbath, you are doing work on the Sabbath, so obviously you are not a man of God. So they asked who did this. They told them. They asked the man what he thought. He said, "*He is a prophet.* He is a man of God because he does this incredible thing." They said, "Who are we to listen to you? You were born in sin. You have been steeped in sin since birth. How are we supposed to listen to you? We can see, you were blind because you are a sinner. Obviously we are not as bad as you. We know better than you. Our eyes are open." So they ended up kicking this guy out of the synagogue after threatening to do the same to his parents. His parents just backed off and said, "We don't want anything to do with this."

So then in the hearing, Jesus is there. He answers their questions. He tells them who he is and what he is doing. He tells them, "*I am the gate.*" These men had claimed to be able to see, but Jesus uses this figure of speech to show them that they were really spiritually blind, because he uses a figure of speech that they could all understand. Outside of most of the settlements there would have been this short fence and only one gate to go in and out and a watchman standing by it. Sometimes it was out farther away in a smaller place and the shepherd himself would lay across the opening and be the gate himself. But at the largest settlement, there would be a watchman there that would open the door when the shepherd comes in and a lot of the sheep would be together from different shepherds. So the shepherd would call his sheep and his sheep would come after him because they knew his voice. They heard it so often they knew that that voice meant pasture, that voice meant care, that voice meant love and protection. So they followed it. They would go out and he would take them to pasture.

But if you didn't come in through the gate, he is saying, if you didn't come in the right way, the only reason you were there was to be a thief, to steal by cunning, or to be a robber, to steal by force. The people heard him and thought that made sense, but they didn't understand that he was talking about them—those who claim to be the guides are really blind guides. You don't understand. You don't understand spiritual truth. You are counterfeit voices of the Shepherd. You are leading people away from me. So he has to say it very clearly, "*I am the gate.*" Now the people would understand that he was speaking to them and that he was rebuking them and saying that they were blind guides, that they were the people who were the thieves and the robbers.

We might think it's obvious to recognize the voice of a thief and a robber that is not speaking what the genuine Shepherd does. But it's not necessarily so. Many voices come promising things that we want to hear. People at times will follow after them because they are grasping at straws, and if you don't know the voice of the Shepherd well enough you are going to follow some of these counterfeit voices because they sound appealing. Jesus says the sheep don't follow the counterfeit voice because they know the genuine voice of the Shepherd so well. The problem among us at times is that we don't know the Shepherd's voice well enough.

I see examples of it all the time around me. When there is a best seller that has been on the best seller's list for over a year—the only book thankfully that outsells it is the Bible—when I see this book and it claims that Jesus actually married Mary Magdalene and they had descendants and there has been this huge cover up to change Scripture to make it different than what it really intended it to be. Then I hear people that have grown up in our church body say, “Did you hear that Jesus actually was married?” Because we see it on the Discovery Channel or read it in a book and now all of a sudden we think it's true? If we know the Shepherd's voice well enough, we know what it says in Isaiah—who can speak of his descendants? Is Isaiah saying that there is going to be a massive cover up?—that's what I'm talking about so no one will speak of his descendants—or is the clear understanding of that Scripture to say that he never married. His life was cut off short, which is exactly the context of the whole area surrounding that passage. So you know it's a lie. It's a counterfeit voice. It's leading you away from Scripture and the devil is cackling in hell as people say, “Yeah, that sounds right. It's just a massive conspiracy. I don't need to look in Scripture because I can see it's a conspiracy.” We might think we would never fall into that.

Yesterday's paper, in the Press Gazette, there is always a faith section or religious section—a column down the left side of the page written by some clergy. Yesterday there was one about following your own principles. It was actually kind of good—don't follow the crowd, follow your principles and all of that. I think all of us here that would read it would say that is true. I got done reading it and thought to myself, “What's missing? There is something not quite right here. It sounds kind of good but it doesn't sound quite right.” Never once did it say to follow God's principles. It said to follow your principles.

You and I aren't here to follow our principles because we are born with a sinful nature and we are going to screw up. We are going to do dumb things and then excuse them with all of our excuses and our principles will become like silly putty until we can stretch it so that it looks the way we want it. You and I are here to follow God's principles—to follow his voice, and to hear his sting of rebuke when you and I have screwed up and we don't want to admit it. But then God says to us, “That is sin and that killed my son.” But then you and I know that he is going to say to us, “But my son took away that sin. You are forgiven. You are loved.” So we don't need to make the excuses, but counterfeit shepherds—these imposters that come to rob and to deceive—are going to lead us on a path that might sound good, it might sound noble, it might even sound godly, but if it's not centered in the gate, in Jesus, his life and death and his Word spoken to give us direction and comfort and security, it is not the abundant life. It is coming to rob, steal and destroy. That is what our Good Shepherd said to us.

So what's the answer? How can we understand when it's a counterfeit voice? There is only one answer. Know the Shepherd's voice so well that when you hear these other voices, no matter how good they sound, they sound like fingernails on a chalkboard to you because you recognize it's not God. It's something else. So know the Good Shepherd's voice so you can hear the imposters and get away from them.

Okay, there are imposters, you still haven't told me what the abundant life is, right? If you are still awake, maybe you are thinking that. What is the abundant life Jesus said that he came to bring us?—the full life.

When Adam and Eve were created, they were in the image of God. When you and I were born, we were in the image of our parents who were in the image of their parents who were in the image of Adam—which is sinful. We don't have the fullness of what God intended when he created this world. We are born with a sinful nature. The full abundant life is what God gives us through his gift of faith—the image of God restored in us—faith that Jesus lived in our place and died in our place and that whoever comes to him, as he said, they will be saved. “...*whoever enters through me will be saved*”—saved from sin, saved from eternal death, saved from hell, enjoying the renewed image of God in us in this lifetime although it's not perfect because you and I still have a sinful nature. We are still on that constant struggle against the sinful nature and the renewed image of God—the new self that is in us. There is that constant battle within us about which voice to listen to—the one that wants to hear the Shepherd, the one that rejoices to hear the Shepherd, the one that tunes out everything but the Shepherd is the new self that's in us—the image of God. We have it imperfectly now, but we will have it perfectly when our Good Shepherd takes us to dwell in the house of the Lord forever. That is our confidence. That is our comfort.

So whenever we are struggling against these voices that want to lead us away from this truth and get us to focus on the here and now or some other promise of help that doesn't come from God's voice, we turn to our Good Shepherd and he speaks in his Word. He speaks of his comfort. He speaks of his love. He tells us he will lead us to pastures that will nourish us. That pasture is the Word and returning us to our baptism and returning us to the Lord's Supper so that our sins are washed away. That is the full life God has for us. And that's what enables us to recognize the imposter's voice. That's what enables us to point out to others that those are liars and cheats and thieves. Here's the genuine voice of the Good Shepherd. Listen to it, because it is a matter of life and death—abundant life or no life at all, but the agony of hell.

You and I have the answer. We have that voice. It speaks to us and it can speak to us regularly and daily and it can strengthen us so that we become his vocal chords.