

Rev. Anthony T. Bertram

THE DOOR, THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP
John 10:1-10; Easter 4A; April 25-26, 2026

Our “Good Shepherd Sunday” Gospel did not begin with Jesus’ familiar words, **“I AM the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep”** (10:11). Rather, we heard Jesus teach about a door. **“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. But He who enters by the door is the Shepherd of the sheep. To Him the Gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear His voice, and He calls His own sheep by name and leads them out. When He has brought out all His own, He goes before them, and the sheep follow Him, for they know His voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.”** This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but **they did not understand what He was saying to them.**

Who were the “they” who did not understand what Jesus meant? They were the Pharisees who had rejected Jesus as their Savior. Do you understand what Jesus is saying to you in this Scripture? If you trust in Jesus as your Good Shepherd and Savior, you will welcome His words of explanation. **“Truly, truly, I say to you, I AM the Door of the sheep. All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. 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.”**

We are familiar with doors; they are everywhere. Doorways mark where we can enter or exit a space. Doing this, doors serve both a positive and negative function. Positively, they are our way in and out. Most buildings have exterior doors that are easily seen so people know how to get in. Exits are marked with lighted signs to show how to get out in an emergency. Negatively, doors also prevent people from entering or exiting. Doors can be shut and locked. Jails and prisons use a series of locked doors. Doors give us a way in or out while, at the same time, prevent us from entering or exiting.

How does Jesus function like a door?

“I am the Door.,” Jesus says. **“If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.”** This statement is confusing. Earlier, pasture for the sheep was described as the shepherd **“leading them out”** of the sheepfold, or courtyard. Now Jesus says pasture is found by **“going in.”** A sheepfold is like a holding pen, not a green pasture for sheep to feed on grass. Why did Jesus describe **going in** through the door, or gate, the way to the pasture?

Jesus was teaching in the temple courts in Jerusalem at that time. To get from the outer courts into the inner courts of the temple required going through a door or gate. Inside the courtyard was where the sacrifices and prayers to God were offered. Inside the temple was where God promised to be to help and save His people. The Old Testament describes God’s people as His sheep and the temple as the place where God’s sheep were fed and nourished.

When Jesus said, **“I AM the Door of the sheep,”** He meant that He is the way to God and His gifts. In Jesus’ illustration, God the Father is the **Gatekeeper** that opens the door of the courtyard to the **Shepherd,** Jesus His Son. There the Good Shepherd calls His sheep by name and leads them out and back in; the sheep follow Him because they know His voice. Later in John’s Gospel we hear Jesus’ familiar words that emphasize this point. **“I AM the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me”** (14:6).

How do we become Jesus’ sheep and children of God our Father? Jesus **calls us by name** in Holy Baptism, making us His sheep and children of our heavenly Father by faith in Him. This Word of Christ in the water of baptism works this faith in Jesus. It is the Word of life that we hear and learn in our church and school, Bible class and Sunday school, Bible reading, and our personal and family devotions.

By this hearing, we learn to recognize the voice of the Good Shepherd so, when He calls us by name, we will follow where He leads: **to green pastures and beside still waters.** We are baptized in that water and fed by His Word and the Sacrament of His body and blood. Our Shepherd **restores our soul** by forgiving our sins as He leads us on the **paths of righteousness** to God our Father in heaven. Jesus is our Door through whom we go in and out and find pasture and are saved.

Jesus warns of **thieves and robbers** which come to **steal, kill, and destroy** God's sheep. They are not the Shepherd since they do not enter by the Door, that is, by faith in Jesus. It is important for us to distinguish between Jesus, the Good Shepherd, and thieves and robbers who often claim to come in the name of the Shepherd, so we are not deceived by them and follow them out of God's flock. We should recognize them as strangers and avoid them. **"A stranger [the sheep] will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers... All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them."**

God does not want His sheep stolen, killed, and destroyed in hell forever. That's why He sent the Good Shepherd to lead us **through the valley of the shadow of death... to dwell in the house of the LORD forever**. Our Shepherd knows the way to lead because He walked that path ahead of us. Jesus took the way of the cross and "death's dark vale" (*LSB 709:4*) because of our sins. He suffered our death on the cross and came out of the grave victorious. Our Shepherd seeks us when we have gotten ourselves lost in sin, finds and brings us home to be with Him. The Good Shepherd carries us on His shoulders like He carried our cross on His shoulders and brings us home to live within the Lord's house forever.

It is fitting to sing Psalm 23 hear this Gospel Reading during the Easter season. Jesus is the Door of the sheep into the temple courts of heaven to live. The Good Shepherd leads His sheep to pasture to be fed and nourished now and then to life everlasting in heaven. Jesus came to carry out His Father's plan: **"I have come that [My sheep] may have life and have it abundantly."** The "life" Jesus means is the life we have now by faith in Him and the life we will have forever. To have this life "abundantly" means it exceeds and surpasses what passes for life in this world now.

Yes, we have life in the world right now, which is a gift from God. Our lives are full of good things which we enjoy and experience, which are gifts from God. The temptation is to treat these worldly gifts as if they are the most important things in life and to act as if they will last forever, but they are not most important and will not endure forever.

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Jesus introduced His parable of the rich fool with this warning: **“Be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”** The abundant life Jesus promises is not measured by how much stuff we have, the stuff we can't take with us to the grave. God in Christ says to the rich man who thought life did consist in the abundance of his possessions: **“Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God”** (Luke 12:15, 20-21).

From very young to very old, we pass through various stages of life. There are things that are important to us in each stage. For the young, it might be our friends, popularity among our peers, success in sports or other areas of interest, and gaining the freedom to do what we want. As adults, it might be a spouse and children, a career, or making money so we can buy the stuff we want and feel financially secure. As we age, it might be holding onto our wealth and health so we can remain independent.

Easter defines what it really means for us to **have life and have it abundantly**. The things I just noted are all important gifts from God, but they do not last forever. Knowing that the things of this world are temporary, not permanent, changes our priorities. We will give thanks to God for what we have from Him and use His gifts for His glory and the good of others, and not just for ourselves. God forgives our sins abundantly so we can forgive each other abundantly. God heals our illnesses, restores our losses, and raises us from the dead. As this sinful world steals, kills, and destroys, we know that we will pass through this dark vale and we shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Jesus is the Door into this abundant life. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who leads us, His sheep, in and out to green pastures and quiet waters. We recognize our Shepherds' voice and follow where He leads us because we know He has gone there before us. He is leading us to His Father's house to live with Him as God's children forever. Amen.